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**Patriarchal Religion as Portrayed in
Genesis 12-50: Comparison with
Ancient Near Eastern and Later
Israelite Religions**

By
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A thesis submitted to the Open University in fulfilment of the requirements of the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Although Wellhausen had already rejected the historicity of the patriarchs, and with it their religion, and argued that the patriarchal traditions were retrojections of the Monarchical period reflecting the time that the stories arose in Israel, Albrecht Alt made a definitive beginning ^{to} the study of patriarchal religion with his essay, 'Der Gott der Väter, in which he argued both for a patriarchal religion distinct from Mosaic religion and for the possibility of its originating during or just before the settlement of Israelite clans in Canaan. While many since Wellhausen have continued to reject the historicity of the patriarchs, a number of scholars, in the light of Ugaritic and other archaeological discoveries, have followed Alt in arguing for a distinct patriarchal religion before exodus and before Moses. However, the study of patriarchal religion has chiefly been confined either to the different divine names or to the social and legal practices attested in Genesis. The result of this is that the patriarchal religious and cultic practices frequently attested in Genesis have hardly been focused upon, except by a few scholars who have touched upon them only in passing.

The present thesis takes its departure both from the scholarly consensus and from the Hebrew Bible's own testimony that patriarchal religion was distinct from Mosaic religion. In the present thesis, this distinction is chiefly sought in patriarchal worship and cultic practices, such as altars, prayer, pillars, tithes, vows and ritual purity. These aspects are studied in the light of both second millennium ancient Near Eastern and Israelite parallels. This is legitimate since patriarchal religion is portrayed as pre-Mosaic, and since the narrators are Israelites with a Yahwistic ethos. Our findings have been that the patriarchs shared elements in common with both the ANE and Israel only in regard to the concept of their worship and cultic practices. However, the manner of their cultic activity bore no comparison to that of the ANE or Israel, in that the patriarchs themselves built altars and made sacrifices, conducted prayer, raised pillars and offered worship, all without the aid of an established cult or priests. Further, they did these things in an informal and family setting wherever they moved or happened to camp. Neither were the patriarchal religious activities of tithing, vowing or purifying performed at a cult place. While Jacob himself was the sole officiant of the ritual purification of his family at Bethel, Abraham's tithe was voluntary and secular, and Jacob's religious tithes and vows were unpaid probably due to the absence of any cult or the priests who would be expected to appropriate them. Thus, patriarchal religion was distinct from both the ancient Near Eastern and Israelite religions, and compatible only with the lifestyle portrayed in Genesis.

Preface

Citation of sources

Biblical books are abbreviated as follows:

Gen, Ex, Lev, Num, Deut, Jos, Judg, Sam, Ki, Isa, Jer, Ezek, Hos, Joel, Amos, Obad, Jon, Mic, Nah, Hab, Zeph, Hag, Zech, Mal, Ps, Job, Prov, Ruth, Song, Eccl, Lam, Esth, Dan, Ezra, Neh, Chr.

Biblical texts are cited in their Hebrew numeration. Ugaritic texts are cited by KTU where possible. Hebrew and Aramaic words under discussion are given in Hebrew script, Greek in Greek script and other languages in transliteration. The Hebrew used is BHS, and the English text cited is RSV.

Reference works are cited by the abbreviations listed in the Bibliography, other works by author's name and year of publication. Two authors are indicated by a spaced hyphen, e.g. Gunkel - Begrich. All volume numbers are given in Arabic numerals. Works are normally cited in chronological order.

English translations of non-English works have been consulted, since translations often incorporate revision and are more accessible. However, the original work has been consulted where relevant (e.g. Westermann on Gen 23:4).

Bibliography

All sources consulted and are relevant in the thesis are listed in the Bibliography. Reference works are listed first with abbreviations by which they are cited in the thesis. Where a work has several editions, the date indicated after the author is that of the edition given at the end of entry. Where a work^{is} consulted from another language, the date of the original is given where available.

Statement

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. A brief survey of research on patriarchal religion

The aim of this thesis is to describe the religion of the patriarchs from Israel's own understanding of her traditions.¹ However, it is important to give a brief survey of descriptions of patriarchal religion from other perspectives in order to show how they contribute to, or differ from, the present study. It has long been observed that the patriarchal religion portrayed in Genesis has elements both peculiar to itself and common to the Yahwistic religion of later times. The clearest example of this is the idea of God portrayed in the narratives, which makes no distinction between the God of the patriarchs and Yahweh, the God of Israel. Genesis thus assumes that Yahweh, the God of Israel, was the God of the patriarchs as well. Consequently a number of scholars have argued that patriarchal religion was both a prelude to, and continuous with, the Mosaic religion, thus essentially accepting the historicity of the patriarchs.² But Wellhausen and many following him contest the historicity of the patriarchs, and with it their religion. They maintain that the patriarchal traditions were retrojections of the monarchic period reflecting the time the stories arose in Israel, not historical knowledge of the patriarchs. Thus, for them, there is no such thing as a patriarchal period or patriarchal religion.³

However, with Alt's seminal essay 'Der Gott der Väter' in 1929, not only was the issue of the historicity of the patriarchs brought into sharp focus again, but also the question of the probability of their religion being distinct from that of later Israel was raised.⁴ Alt began his search with the assumption that the God or gods of the patriarchs must be different from the God of Israel, because certain traditions of Israel state that Israel's fathers worshipped other gods beyond the river (Josh 24:2-14)⁵ while other traditions insist that Yahweh, the God of Israel, is to be identified with the God of the fathers (Ex 3:13ff.; 6:2ff.). As Alt pursued his study, he came to the conclusion that the patriarchs worshipped different gods of their own clans, but the editors of Genesis identified them with Yahweh, the God of Israel. This identification took place, according to Alt, in the course of historical development. Patriarchal groups, being semi-nomadic, settled independently with their own clan gods on the fringes of the plains. These

¹ For a discussion of method to be followed here, see below.

² Dillmann, Gunkel, Gressmann, Kittel; cf. Weidmann (1968: 46-64).

³ Wellhausen (1885: 318ff.); Hoftijzer (1956: 6-30); Thompson (1974); Van Seters (1975; 1980: 220-33).

⁴ Alt (See bibliography; 1989a: 1-77).

⁵ Cf. Kittel (1925: 39); contrast Sarna (1989: 396-97).

wandering groups eventually came into contact with sedentary dwellers and worshipped at the local shrines, thus identifying their gods with the local shrines' deities. (Alt took the *Elim* of Genesis as local *numina*.) Thus distinction can be seen between 'the God of Abraham', 'the God of Isaac' and 'the God of Jacob': these were different clan gods which were later merged into 'the God of the fathers'.⁶ In Alt's words: 'The gods of the fathers were the παιδαγωγοί leading to the greater God, who later replaced them completely.'⁷ Further, Alt thought that the patriarchal gods were originally anonymous gods who were later identified with the local Canaanite gods. Their oldest names were 'Fear of Isaac', 'Mighty One of Jacob', 'God of Abraham', etc. Alt also thought that patriarchal nomadism was a stage in the process toward sedentarisation. He drew possible religio-historical parallels from Nabataean and Palmyrene inscriptions in Greek and Aramaic dating from the first century BC to the fourth century AD. These reflect a people who, like the patriarchs, were nomadic tribes and worshipped the gods of the heads of their clans.⁸ However Alt's conclusions are evaluated, since his work the majority of scholars have acknowledged that an inquiry into patriarchal religion before the exodus and the settlement in the land is possible.

However, Alt's thesis has been found untenable in a number of aspects. Alt's parallels from the early Christian era are thought to be too remote to be applied to the patriarchal era. It is questioned whether there was anything distinctively nomadic about the mode of designating gods, for all the inscriptions quoted come from settled peoples, and the people named were not the founders of the cults in question.⁹ The biblical evidence Alt adduced was shown to be weak, for his conjectures that the cult of 'the god of Abraham', 'the fear of Isaac' and 'the bull of Jacob' existed among the tribes of Caleb/Judah, Judah/Simeon and Joseph respectively has been found to be baseless.¹⁰ Alt's view that the patriarchs worshipped anonymous gods who were identified only by their worshippers is also rejected on the basis of the old Assyrian texts from nineteenth-century Cappadocia, where a high god is described in terms similar to the patriarchal narratives; it is argued that the real name of the patriarchal god was El Shaddai.¹¹ Further, the designation 'god of my father' only expresses the relationship of the worshipper to the deity, and such a description is found to be very common in relation to the named gods throughout the ancient Near East.¹² It reflects not the name of the deity, but the relation of that deity to the worshipper, comparable to 'God of Israel.'¹³

⁶ Alt (1989a: 25-30).

⁷ Alt (1989a: 62).

⁸ Alt (1989a: 32-44).

⁹ Lods (1938: 201); cf. May (1941^a: 127); Cross (1962: 229-31); Lods thought that the patriarchs were deified ancestors, a view that was previously refuted by Dillmann (1897: 3-8).

¹⁰ Haran (1965: 51 n.34); cf. Wenham (1980: 166-67).

¹¹ Lewy (1934: 50-64); cf. Albright (1935: 188-90); May (1941a: 123-26).

¹² Cf. the various examples given by Cross (1962: 228f., 231; 1973: 10-12).

¹³ Westermann (1985: 108).

Despite the problems raised by Alt's thesis, for some scholars it led the way toward an inquiry into the nature of the 'God of the fathers' behind the divine names found in Genesis,¹⁴ while others turned toward the social and legal practices reflected in the patriarchal narratives. The aim of both these trends was to unravel the distinctive features of the religion of the patriarchs before the exodus and the settlement in Canaan. The former concentrated on the precise determination of the designation for God, assuming that this would clarify the nature of the patriarchal religion. Soon the conclusion that the patriarchal religion was a type of El-religion gained wide currency among scholars.¹⁵ This may be partly because these designations are used only in relation to patriarchal times, suggesting that it was a distinct phase in the religion of Israel.¹⁶ However, it is still disputed whether these designations were inherited from Canaan or known by the Hebrews from their ancestors and brought with them into Canaan.¹⁷ Further, with the discoveries of the Ugaritic texts, where El is described so colourfully as the father of the gods and the head of the Canaanite pantheon, subsequent scholarship has tried to see a connection between the different designations used for God in Genesis and the El of the Ugaritic texts.¹⁸ Thus one could accept with little difficulty that the god El could be described as 'the god of my father' or as El Elyon, El Shaddai or El Olam, the different divine designations used in Genesis. This line of argument has been followed by F.M. Cross.¹⁹

Cross made a thorough analysis of the ancient Near Eastern parallels in order to compare the divine epithets in Genesis with the known characteristics of El from Ugarit and elsewhere in the Near East. He assumed that, if El can be described by these titles, then patriarchal religion may be described as a form of El religion. Certain titles like *El Elohe Israel* and *El Elohe abika* (Gen 33:20; 46:3) have an undoubted affinity to the Canaanite El. But the other titles, *El Olam*, *El Elyon* and *El Shaddai*, also fit the known character of El, because of their meaning and their context in Genesis. Cross finds difficulty only with *El*

¹⁴ These are formed by the well known Semitic word for god, El, which occurs in the construct state and is followed by a genitive, or an attributive noun supplemented to it. Thus the appellations focused upon were: *El Elyon* (Gen 14:18-22), *El Roi* (Gen 16:13), *El Olam* (Gen 21:33), *El Elohe Israel* (Gen 33:20), *El Bethel* (Gen 31:13; 35:7) and *El Shaddai* (Gen 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:13; 48:3; 49:25 [*we'el Shaddai* should be read here instead of *we'et Shaddai*]). Cf. Haran (1965: 47 n.10). It must be pointed out that the title 'God of the father' is another designation peculiar to patriarchal traditions and times. Haran (1965: 36-37) argues that this is a 'crystallized expression reflecting a religious concept of another period', probably indicating a household god of a small clan. Several scholars also argued that the name YHWH is also a remnant of pre-Mosaic traditions, and that it is not justified to interpret it entirely from post-Mosaic concepts only. Rowley (1950: 149ff.); Hyatt (1955: 133-36); Cross (1962: 251-59); Maclaurin (1962: 439-63); Kosmala (1963: 103-6).

¹⁵ Lewy (1934); Albright (1935); Rist (1938: 289-303); May (1941b: 155-58); Hyatt (1955: 130-36); Gemser (1958: 1-21); Cross (1962: 225-59; 1973); Manley (1964: 3-7); Haran (1965: 30-55); Eissfeldt (1968: 79-91).

¹⁶ It may be pointed out, however, that this idea was also held by several scholars even before Alt, e.g. Gunkel (1902); Gressmann (1910); Kittel (1925: 41-45); Baudissin (1925); cf. Westermann (1985: 106).

¹⁷ Gunkel (1902), Gressmann (1910: 8ff., 28ff.), and Haran (1965: 33-35) hold that it was a direct Hebrew heritage, while Eissfeldt (1956: 25-37), Weippert (1961: 42-62) and Cross (1962: 244-47), following Alt, argue that it was inherited from Canaan. Cf. Haran (1965: 47 n.13).

¹⁸ Cf. Pope (1955: 82-89).

¹⁹ Cross (1962; 1973: 3-75).

Shaddai, to which he attributes an Amorite origin and which he suggests was brought by the patriarchs from Mesopotamia. Thus, for Cross, the different divine names of Genesis do not represent the gods of different clans before they adopted Yahwism, as argued by Alt,²⁰ but they were different titles of El during the pre-Mosaic period. This also explains why these titles of El were more readily acceptable to later Yahwism than those associated with the Baal cult. Cross plausibly suggests a basic continuity between the patriarchal religion, a form of El religion, and the Yahwism adopted later by the tribes of Israel. Not surprisingly, Cross's thesis has been accepted by many scholars, not only because of the brilliant way he handled the comparative materials but also because his parallels were much closer in time and place to the patriarchal times.²¹ Nevertheless, several scholars challenge Cross's identification of *Elyon*²² and *El Shaddai*²³ with the Canaanite El, while others point out that the patriarchs probably knew El before they entered Canaan.²⁴

The other trend resulting from Alt's essay was that which focused on the personal names, people movements and religious, political, social and legal practices of the patriarchal traditions. Certain assumptions and legal concepts reflected in the patriarchal stories either are inexplicable by the conditions of later Israel or openly contradict the various laws of the pentateuchal codes. Yet these customs and practices are surprisingly similar to the social and legal ideas reflected at Nuzi, Mari and Alalakh.²⁵ This combination of similarity with second millennium practices outside Israel and dissimilarity with first millennium Israelite customs has led scholars to reconsider the antiquity of the patriarchal traditions. This would accord with the observation that the divine appellations in the patriarchal narratives, whether the heritage of Canaan or Mesopotamia, belong to the patriarchal age, and with the conclusion that the traditions of Genesis preserve a genuine memory of patriarchal religion before the exodus. Thus the thesis that patriarchal religion was more at home with the form of society and the lifestyle of the patriarchs portrayed in Genesis than with the religion of the monarchic period was affirmed.

²⁰ Cross (1973: 4 n.3) comments: 'For Alt these contacts [with local deities] were not so much in the Patriarchal, i.e. the pre-Mosaic period, as in the era of the entry into Canaan in "Israelite" times. In our view, this is a fundamental weakness in Alt's historical stance, a position increasingly untenable in view of our present knowledge of the movements in Palestine in the second millennium B.C.'

²¹ Cf. Wenham (1980: 170).

²² Pope (1955: 55-58). However, Lack (1962: 44-64) argued that Elyon was once an epithet of El and only later became a title for Baalshamen and that this explains why Elyon is mentioned alongside El in the Sefire texts. It is part of a long process in which El was displaced by Baal as the latter took over the position and titles of the former. Cf. Koch (1976: 299-332); Wenham (1980: 170).

²³ Ouellette (1969: 470-71) points out that El Shaddai probably refers to Amurru, the god of the steppe, while Baily (1968: 434-38) and Abel (1973: 48-59), drawing attention to several features of the patriarchal narratives, argue that El Shaddai may be identified with the moon god of Haran. Cf. Wenham (1980: 170-71).

²⁴ Haran (1965: 42); Roberts (1972: 34); Wenham (1980: 171).

²⁵ Albright (1940: 80-112; 1968: 47-95); de Vaux (1941: 19-36); Rowley (1952: 299-303); Cross (1962: 225-59; 1973); Bright (1981: 67-103); some scholars, however, argue that the patriarchal traditions cannot go back beyond the Amarna period, that is the 14th century BC, e.g. Gordon (1954: 56-59; 1963: 77-84); cf. Fisher (1973: 59-65). But Gordon's view has been criticised by several scholars, see Thompson (1974: 196-297); Selman (1976: 114-36; 1980: 95).

However, with the studies of T. L. Thompson²⁶ and J. van Seters,²⁷ who revive the earlier thesis of Wellhausen that the patriarchal stories are retrojections of the monarchic period, the whole idea of a patriarchal period and therefore a patriarchal religion has once again been questioned. Thompson and Van Seters have reacted against the way the archaeological evidence was used by the so-called Albright school in support of biblical traditions.²⁸ The studies of both the Albright school and its critics have shown how a particular datum can be used to support both an early and a late date of a particular practice or a custom in the patriarchal narratives. For instance, while parallels were drawn by Speiser between the Nuzi tablets and biblical traditions about adoption contracts and other social and family customs in order to explain various patriarchal practices from a second millennium setting,²⁹ similar parallels from the first millennium were drawn by Van Seters to explain the same practices.³⁰ Such opposing conclusions may simply reflect different methodologies. Besides, these studies have reflected, as has been rightly pointed out by Millard, 'an air ... of search for proof, of an attempt to support a view or a hypothesis by choosing the most suitable evidence - and this applies to those who invoke texts for a first-millennium date as much as to those who invoke others for a higher date.'³¹ On the other hand, social customs probably survived basically unchanged for centuries, and therefore cannot form a basis for dating the patriarchal period.³² Social and legal customs form just one aspect of the patriarchal lifestyle, and their comparative study may not necessarily point to a precise date of the patriarchal period. This in turn has led to a rethinking of methodological presuppositions by various scholars.³³ The question is: how can different scholars arrive at widely divergent conclusions despite using the same source material? The answer is not too far to seek. From Alt onwards the study of patriarchal religion has been pursued in a historical framework despite the fact that the sources in Genesis stand at a considerable historical remove from the patriarchal period they depict. As a result, scholars

²⁶ Thompson (1974; 1987); cf. Goldingay (1980: 35-40).

²⁷ Van Seters (1975; 1980: 220-33).

²⁸ Albright (1950: 3; 1963: 1-2); Wright (1962: 40); Bright (1981: 80). Cf. Bright's confident assertions in the second edition of his *History of Israel* (1972: 79) about the value of archaeological evidence as proof for the historicity of patriarchal life and times. This confidence is less assertive but still present in the third edition (1981: 80). It is against such confidence that one has to evaluate the studies of Thompson and Van Seters.

²⁹ Speiser (1955: 252-56; 1963b: 15-28; 1964: xxxvii-xliii); cf. Albright (1932: 138,209; 1961: 36-54); Gordon (1940: 1-12; 1954: 56-59). It must be pointed out that these three scholars proposed three different dates for the age of the patriarchs. For a critique of their positions, see Weippert (1971: 407-32); Dever (1977: 91-96); de Vaux (1978: 241-56); Selman (1980: 94-103,109-112).

³⁰ Van Seters (1968: 401-8; 1969: 377-95; 1975: 65-103); cf. Tucker (1966: 77-84). For a critique of Van Seters and others, see Selman (1980: 115-17). Also cf. the different opinions on dating of patriarchs on the basis of the personal names found in the Near Eastern texts: Gordon (1953: 102ff.); Thompson (1974: 22-52).

³¹ Millard (1980: 47).

³² Freedman (1961: 205); Selman (1980: 125).

³³ E.g. Miller (1977), Luke, Talmon, Warner, Millard and Selman.

are not in a position to date patriarchal traditions accurately and to relate them to a wider historical context.³⁴

The 'quest for the historical patriarchs' has been thoroughly pursued by scholars. However, on the one hand, the evidence is not sufficient to date the patriarchs accurately, and, on the other hand, neither Thompson's argument that the patriarchal narratives are unhistorical nor Van Seters' use of first millennium parallels has proved to be satisfactory. Nevertheless, the enormous efforts spent on comparative studies of patriarchal customs in order to ascertain the historicity of the patriarchal stories, though in my view a misplaced emphasis, have not been entirely fruitless.³⁵ One of the significant results of these studies has been the clarification of the methodological confusion of previous studies and the establishment of guidelines for comparing external data with the patriarchal narratives.³⁶ Secondly, the distribution of the parallels over a wide period of time does not disprove the historicity of the patriarchal stories, but they paint a general picture of the ancient Near Eastern family and social practices and thereby the historicity of the patriarchal narratives has been placed in a wider context.³⁷ This insight may be combined with the biblical tradition's own testimony which places the patriarchs in the period before the exodus and sojourn in Egypt.³⁸ As Selman rightly notes, to seek parallels in the first half of the second millennium 'is not due to prejudice but is based on a recognition of the biblical scheme. Unless this pattern is rejected as being entirely unhistorical, it is in the earlier material that contacts might initially be expected to be found, although any proper study of the chronological setting of a Patriarchal Age must include consideration of alternative periods.'³⁹ Westermann's epoch-making commentary on Genesis has led the discussion in this direction.

Westermann extensively surveys various literary, form and tradition history studies of the patriarchal narratives and the archaeological studies which focus on the lifestyle, practices and customs of various peoples of the world of the patriarchs.⁴⁰ His conclusions are very revealing. He observes that the patriarchal stories are the product of a long process of tradition, and were probably transmitted orally in their earliest stages. 'We will never achieve complete certainty as to which texts in Gen. 12-50 come from the patriarchal period ...', Westermann notes. 'We can, however, be quite certain that one cannot contest the

³⁴ It is unnecessary for our purpose here to go into the details of discussions over the use, misuse or non-use of comparative social customs in order to establish the historicity of the patriarchal narratives.

³⁵ E.g. the inheritance rights of a slave, or the son of a slave-girl. While these customs may reflect certain aspects of the patriarchal lifestyle, they are not the overriding concern of the narrator who was probably transmitting what his traditions, oral or written, contained. The narrator himself does not intend to draw any conclusions from them. For this very reason, it is possible that they are valuable for historical information.

³⁶ Cf. note 33 above.

³⁷ Selman (1980: 114-15); Westermann (1985: 74,85,86)

³⁸ This is based on the consistent testimony of the genealogies, the chronological data and the historical narratives of the OT. Warner (1977: 59); Selman (1980: 121); cf. Bimson (1980: 81-85).

³⁹ Selman (1980: 121); cf. Millard (1980: 51).

⁴⁰ Westermann (1985: 23-86).

possibility that texts, narratives, and motifs in Gen. 12-50 reach back into the patriarchal period.’⁴¹ It is not possible to fix the patriarchal period by historical data or by the nomadic lifestyle or by customs and practices from the surrounding world because of the nature of the data and its diffusion into an extended period of 2200 to 1200 BC. Thus ‘it was possible to revive J. Wellhausen’s hypothesis, or even to outdo it, by contesting any talk of a patriarchal period at all.’⁴² Nevertheless, the political, economic and religious life presented in the narratives is so distinct from that of later Israel, as known to us from the rest of the OT, that ‘there remains no alternative but to set the group with the form of community presented in the patriarchal stories prior to the period of the tribes.’⁴³

For Westermann, the issue of patriarchal religion cannot be resolved as long as the debate is restricted to the designations or names of God used in Genesis.⁴⁴ If the patriarchal narratives received definitive shape in the period of the early monarchy, and if the Yahwist made his indelible mark on the traditions, not only is it not always possible to distinguish whether a particular text is speaking about Yahweh or the God of the fathers, as J makes no distinction between them, but also it is impossible to know to what extent the theology of the Yahwist has affected other aspects of the patriarchal religion and the final form of the text.⁴⁵ But this need not lead us to despair because one can still identify certain traits peculiar to patriarchal religion, such as the personal relationship between the patriarchs and their God,⁴⁶ the unconditional promises relating to the patriarchal situation,⁴⁷ the lack of priesthood and temple, the lack of holiness relating to God, the lack of the concept of sin and judgement, and the family based patriarchal society.⁴⁸ Westermann argues further that there are different forms of religion within patriarchal religion; for instance, we find that the form of worship in Gen 12-25 is characterised by building altars and calling upon the name of Yahweh, but in Gen 25-36 by raising pillars and anointing them.⁴⁹ However, these and other distinctive features of patriarchal religion have not been pursued further by Westermann. They are only mentioned in the introduction to his commentary and commented on briefly, often with special reference to their distinctiveness, but they are not treated in a comprehensive way.

⁴¹ Westermann (1985: 40 cf. 34); cf. Moberly (1992: 198); Albertz (1994: 28). Sarna (1989: xv-xvii) argues that the internal evidence of Genesis itself is sufficient to suggest that Genesis reflects an authentic picture of early historical traditions.

⁴² Westermann (1985: 85).

⁴³ Westermann (1985: 86).

⁴⁴ This point was already noted by Wenham (1980: 160); later by Moberly (1992a: 79).

⁴⁵ Similar methodological questions are raised by Moberly (1992a: 83).

⁴⁶ Fohrer (1973: 35-42); Westermann (1985: 109); Heimerdinger (1992: 41-55); Albertz (1994: 29,33,34); cf. Cazelles (1975: 141-56).

⁴⁷ Alt (1929); Eissfeldt (1968: 50-62); Westermann (1985); Wenham (1980: 172-75; 1994: xxxiv-v); Mettinger (1988: 63). *Contra* Hoftijzer (1956); Rendtorff (1979); Van Seters (1980); Blum (1985).

⁴⁸ Westermann (1985: 108-113); Moberly (1992b: 84-87).

⁴⁹ Westermann (1985: 107). This factor was already observed by Dillmann (1897: 227f.).

With Köckert's recent work, *Vätergott und Väterverheißungen*, the whole post-Alt debate about patriarchal religion receives a major analysis and appraisal. As Moberly rightly points out, Köckert for the most part focuses his attention on the agenda set by Alt, giving extensive discussion of pre-Yahwistic divine appellations, possible religio-historical analogies, the promises to the patriarchs and their relationship to the election of the fathers. Unlike Westermann, Köckert rejects Alt's hypothesis of patriarchal nomadism which is based on an assumed polarity between the desert and the arable land, between nomadism and sedentarism. He contends that various references to *ēl* in Genesis are not in themselves homogeneous, referring to a distinctive type of deity and his worship, and that customs described in Genesis cannot be read off as reliable indicators of second millennium religious practices. Even if the individual elements within the patriarchal traditions can be seen as much earlier, they do not form a basis for constructing a detailed history of the patriarchal period, still less of the type of religion in which the patriarchs may have engaged. Köckert's view of patriarchal religion hinges primarily on his dating of the patriarchal narratives to the seventh or sixth century BC. Building on the work of Alberty,⁵⁰ he argues that the practices they depict are not distinct from the popular religion prevalent alongside the official Yahwism of that period.⁵¹ Further, Köckert rejects Alt's view that the promises to the fathers are evidence for the idea of their being chosen. This idea was based on two pre-requisites - an understanding of the sovereignty of God, and the special position of Israel in regard to this God of all nations. But neither of these featured either during Israel's early history or in any kind of clan religion. 'It was not Israel's nomadic ancestors, but their descendants in the exile and afterward who interpreted their ancestors in relation to God in such a way, thus learning for themselves that they were chosen in their forefathers.'⁵² However, while Köckert's own theory is less convincing, as we shall see below, he gives little attention to the distinctive traits as outlined by Westermann and others.⁵³

Moberly pertinently counters this approach in his recent work, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*:

If patriarchal religion was in reality popular or family piety contemporary with but outside the mainstream of official Mosaic Yahwism, it is difficult to see why the pentateuchal writers, who are effectively the definitive exponents of official Mosaic Yahwism in Exodus-Deuteronomy, should have done what such a hypothesis requires. They have given traditions depicting non-Yahwistic ethos and practices the considerable luster of inseparable association with the ancestor of Israel's faith, Abraham, and the eponymous ancestor of the whole nation, Jacob/Israel. They have refrained from all adverse comment. And they have gone to considerable lengths to relate such material to Mosaic Yahwism ... One would have thought that straightforward suppression would

⁵⁰ Alberty (1978: 77-91). However, Alberty (1994a: 187) suggests that popular piety changed in the late monarchy under Assyrian and Deuteronomistic influence.

⁵¹ Köckert (1988: 141-47, 309-11). A similar view was already been posited by Van Seters (1980) who thought that the Genesis material originated in Israel's popular piety before the Deuteronomic reform.

⁵² Köckert (1988: 198, cf. 163ff.).

⁵³ Since our main focus will be on the latter aspects, to which Köckert gives only a passing comment (1988: 160-61), his conclusions will not affect our thesis. Cf. Moberly (1992: 195-96).

not only have been easier but also more in keeping with the generally exclusive and polemical nature of Yahwism in Exodus-Deuteronomy.⁵⁴

Further, he argues that, while it is difficult to reconstruct patriarchal religion in accordance with the canons of modern historiography, 'an explanation of patriarchal religion as a disguised form of non-Yahwistic religion in the seventh or sixth centuries [is] extremely implausible', for three important reasons: the Yahwistic respect for patriarchal religion, its coherence and distinctiveness within the pentateuchal traditions, and the undoubted antiquity of the divine, human and geographical names compounded with El.⁵⁵ On the other hand, 'a clear general presumption in favour of an early and historically rooted context for the patriarchal traditions as a whole' emerges from the traditions themselves, although some elements in them may be recognised as 'originating from their interpretation and use in the context of the Exile.'⁵⁶ Thus Moberly attempts to unravel 'a tradition of a distinctive patriarchal religion'⁵⁷ preserved by all the pentateuchal writers in order to reconstruct its distinctive features. Accordingly he highlights: patriarchal monotheism which is completely devoid of the polemic or exclusivism of later Mosaic Yahwism; cultic practices featuring pillars and trees which were condemned in later Yahwism; and the lack of priests and prophets, of moral content and of the notion of holiness, all of which are distinctive features of the Mosaic Yahwism. Moberly admits that one cannot offer a comprehensive picture of patriarchal religion but can only show what is distinctive to it. In the present thesis, however, an attempt will be made at attaining a comprehensive picture of the distinctive cultic practices of the patriarchs, such as altars, prayer, pillars, tithes, vows and purification rites. It is hoped that such an attempt will show not only the religious ethos of the patriarchs but also its distinctiveness in relation to both the ancient Near Eastern and later Israelite religions.

1.2. Method

The chief aim of this study, therefore, is to describe in detail the various cultic practices performed by the patriarchs according to the patriarchal narratives. In other words, our primary sources for this study are the patriarchal narratives themselves, as preserved in Genesis 12-50, because these practices are mentioned only in these narratives and not outside them. In this case, it is necessary to ask certain fundamental questions concerning the origin, history and nature of the texts at hand, and the best way to handle them to achieve our objective of describing the 'religion of the patriarchs as portrayed in the

⁵⁴ Moberly (1992a: 195).

⁵⁵ Moberly (1992a: 195-97).

⁵⁶ Moberly (1992a: 198).

⁵⁷ Moberly (1992a: 84).

patriarchal narratives'. This objective necessarily betrays our assumption that there is such a thing as the religion of the patriarchs portrayed in the texts. That this assumption is compatible with the nature of the texts themselves has already been shown above and will be further discussed below. Whereas it is beyond the scope of the present thesis to go into the details of the origin and history of the text of Genesis, a survey of the methods used so far reveals the problems involved in such a study.

However, it appears that no single method has an exclusive claim to the explication of the texts. Those who follow the source-critical approach have generally assumed that the ideas and people portrayed in the narratives originated with the texts, and the texts that purport to describe events of periods earlier than the monarchy are generally considered retrojections. Thus the patriarchal narratives have little historical value in them.⁵⁸ The form and traditio-historical methods, however, assume that the narratives have an historical kernel and that many texts and ideas go back to the patriarchal period.⁵⁹ Similarly, the archaeological approach assumes the essential historicity of the patriarchs. Literary criticism, on the other hand, focuses solely on the literary aspects of the narratives, giving little or no attention to their history or theology.⁶⁰ While it is legitimate to pursue this kind of inquiry, it does not do complete justice to the intentions of the authors. It is true that attention to the language, style and all the artistry of composition focuses on the given text rather than the supposed background,⁶¹ but this does not necessarily discern the overall purpose of the author. Like other methods which were preoccupied with origins and historicity, this method might become bogged down, this time with literary form.

However, the Genesis authors seem to be concerned more with content and purpose than with the form of the materials they were handling.⁶² We hope to focus on the overall content and purpose of the Genesis authors in the present thesis. This may be best achieved by a synchronic approach to the Genesis texts than by the diachronic approach followed by traditional source, form and traditio-historical methods. The latter basically assume the composite nature of the texts and attempt to recover the original text behind the present one. Perhaps inevitably, these methods resulted in conflicting theories about the origin and date of the texts and the ideas contained in them.⁶³ This is one of the chief reasons why literary critics were dissatisfied with them.⁶⁴ But by a synchronic approach

⁵⁸ Wellhausen (1885: 9) and other literary critics accepted that the documents were ultimately based on some pre-literary oral traditions, but these were completely transformed in the documents which thus have no historical value. Cf. Whybray (1987: 22-28).

⁵⁹ Gunkel (1902); Alt (1929=1989); von Rad (1965); Westermann (1985; 1986).

⁶⁰ This is plainly admitted by several structuralists, e.g. Jacobson (1974: 157); cf. Exum (1973: 47); Boadt (1973: 20-34), though this was not the aim of the early critics, e.g. Muilenburg (1969: 1-18). For a representative sample of this approach and further bibliography, see House (1992).

⁶¹ Muilenburg (1969: 7); Alter (1981: 12,21 cf. 14).

⁶² For instance, Gen 12:1-3, 17; 13:8-13; 14:24; 15:6; 17:1-2 and 22:1,17,18 state or imply that the author has a definite purpose for including these traditions.

⁶³ Cf. Westermann (1985: 30).

⁶⁴ Alter (1981: 14); Gunn (1987: 69f.); Clements (1989: 11f.); House (1992: 8).

we take the given text or book as a unit despite the disparate materials brought together by the final author. This has the merit of looking at the patriarchal narratives as they lie before us. It assumes that the final author or editor has an overall plan and purpose for their present form and place in their present context. It will not attempt to discover the texts behind the present ones and the various intermediary stages.⁶⁵ In this regard we follow the literary critical approach, but unlike the literary approach, we will not study the patriarchal narratives for their artistic worth as literature, however legitimate this may be. At the same time we do not discard insights provided by any of the methods mentioned above. For this reason, we frequently discuss the issue of sources in this thesis and evaluate critical findings. We are chiefly concerned with the perspective of the final author for several reasons: First, it is the synchronic approach that allows us to look at Genesis as a whole in its final form. This is a more certain basis than are the supposed sources and their redaction. The final author intended these sources to be read in their present order. The Jewish and Christian communities have read the Bible in this manner for over two millennia. Any attempt to bypass the final author is to suppress his voice and intention. Secondly, to date there has been little study of patriarchal religion from such a perspective, though several studies from this perspective have appeared on different themes of Genesis.⁶⁶ Thirdly, only the final author's perspective allows us to see the patriarchal life and religion as a unified whole, since there is a consistency about his portrayal of the patriarchs in regard to their social life, beliefs and customs.

A further feature of our approach is a comparison of the ancient Near Eastern and later Israelite cultic practices with the patriarchal practices. There are two reasons for this. First, it is universally agreed that the patriarchal traditions were written from the perspective of Yahwism, the official religion of the Israelite nation. Hence we may safely presuppose that the patriarchal traditions were coloured by the ideas and perspectives of Yahwistic authors. Therefore it is logical to expect parallels of patriarchal cultic practices in Israelite traditions. A comparative analysis of Israelite cultic practices might throw light on the patriarchal practices and thus becomes imperative. At the same time, the assumption that the patriarchal traditions were coloured by later Yahwistic authors will be constantly tested in the present thesis. At the very outset it may be noted that the Yahwistic authors of Genesis presupposed a basic continuity between the faith of the patriarchs and their own only in certain aspects, such as belief in Yahweh, promises to the patriarchs and circumcision, but not in regard to their cultic practices such as building altars, planting trees, calling upon the name of Yahweh, raising pillars, tithing, making vow and performing purificatory rituals. Each of these aspects will be discussed in detail in separate chapters in the body of this

⁶⁵ Traditio-historical critics follow this approach, which is considered to be more hypothetical than the source critical approach. Whybray (1987: 138).

⁶⁶ Redford (1970) and Coats (1976) on the Joseph story, and Fokkelman (1975) and Fishbane (1979) on the Jacob stories. Wenham (1987: xxxii-xxxvi) and Sarna (1989: xvii-xviii) are among the few commentators to follow this approach.

thesis. Thus there is a tension between the beliefs and practices of the patriarchs and that of the authors who portrayed them. The authors of Genesis probably left much unsaid concerning patriarchal cultic practices because of this tension and perhaps also because of their unfamiliarity with these practices. A comparative study of patriarchal and Israelite cultic practices thus becomes important, in order to show the distinctiveness of the former more clearly.

Secondly, a comparative study of patriarchal worship and cultic practices alongside with ancient Near Eastern practices becomes equally imperative for several reasons. First, Israel was not an isolated entity in Canaan. Its historical, cultural, linguistic and religious affinities with neighbours such as Egypt, Assyria and Babylon are undeniable. Many of these aspects can be demonstrated from both the biblical and the archaeological records.⁶⁷ Therefore the distinctiveness or commonality of Israel's religion can only be understood or appreciated when set against the religions of its neighbours. Secondly, if the patriarchal lifestyle, beliefs and practices belong to pre-Mosaic and pre-Yahwistic times, we may find parallels from the wider context of the ANE. This is not to prove the historicity of the patriarchs or their beliefs but to see whether non-Yahwistic elements of patriarchal religion have anything in common with the ANE, and how such parallels might help us understand the religion of the patriarchs. This leads us to define the focus of the present study.

1.3. Focus and aim

Obviously it is impossible to focus on all aspects of patriarchal religion in the patriarchal narratives. As we noted above, only those religious aspects that are distinctive to the patriarchal lifestyle, such as building altars, calling upon the name of Yahweh (praying), planting trees, raising pillars, paying tithes, making vows and performing purification rites will be dealt with in the present thesis. The patriarchs are described as engaging in these cultic practices in order to maintain their religious piety. There is a consistent portrayal about these aspects as being distinctive to their religion and lifestyle. The distinctiveness is not in the aspects themselves but in the way the patriarchs were involved in these practices. Altars and sacrifices were common to ancient Near Eastern and Israelite religions, but altars were not built by individuals nor were sacrifices offered by lay people like the patriarchs. Altars were largely if not entirely present in the organised or popular cult in which priests and sanctuaries occupied the pre-eminent place. Similarly, planting trees or raising pillars in order to worship God is not just unattested in later Israel but explicitly prohibited, yet the writers of Genesis portray these patriarchal practices as normal and even approved by the same God whom they themselves worshipped. They

⁶⁷ Walton (1989: 13,14); cf. Albertz (1994: 28-29).

were attested in the ANE, but in the organised cult. Thus patriarchal actions associated with these practices are distinct from the customs of both the ANE and Israel.

Similarly, prayer, tithing, vow making and purificatory rituals were common in the ANE and Israel, but in the latter they largely took place at sanctuaries with the aid of the priests. Moreover, nearly every religious practice had detailed legislation. In contrast, there is no legislation on any of these practices in the patriarchal narratives. Most of them were carried out voluntarily by the patriarchs, except that Abraham and Jacob were each asked once to build an altar. In most of the cultic activities the patriarchs themselves were the officiants, but this was not condemned or disapproved by the later writers, although contrary to their own beliefs. These distinctive patriarchal cultic practices have hardly been studied so far, and only Westermann, Wenham and Moberly have given any attention to them. Moberly in particular devotes a chapter especially to highlighting the distinctive character of the religion of the patriarchs. He contends that all the major pentateuchal writers in Genesis, i.e. J, E and P, portrayed a distinctively pre-Mosaic or non-Yahwistic character of the patriarchal period in lifestyle, beliefs, customs and values. As Moberly's approach is theological, he takes his cue from the Priestly writer's claim that God was not known to the patriarchs by the name of Yahweh. From this he goes on to demonstrate that all the other authors of Genesis maintained a distinct pattern of God's dealings with the patriarchs from that of Israel.⁶⁸ He especially focuses on patriarchal monotheism (despite the different divine names used in the patriarchal narratives and later Israelite traditions), cultic practices, holiness and morality.⁶⁹ But he does not deal in any detail with the patriarchal religious and cultic practices, though these probably represent the core of their religion. Even with other aspects, he does no more than highlight the distinctive nature of these elements in contrast to their portrayal in later Israelite religion. Thus there is a serious gap in relation to research on patriarchal religion. The present thesis undertakes to bridge this gap by dealing with the patriarchal religious and cultic practices in detail. What we propose to do is to demonstrate the distinctive character of patriarchal religion from their religious and cultic practices as portrayed in Genesis. For the reasons given above, our focus will be limited to these aspects.

Other aspects such as the nature of the God of the fathers, the promises to the patriarchs and the rite of circumcision will not receive attention in this thesis, partly due to constraints on space and partly due to the excessive attention already given to them. Further, these do not count as religious or cultic aspects in which the patriarchs were engaged in order to maintain their religious piety. They are related to the aspect of their faith which is a necessary corollary of their religion. Although the authors of Genesis portrayed God's dealings with the patriarchs and his unconditional promises to them as distinctive,

⁶⁸ However, only P seems to be a true Yahwist, J and E do not seem to share the Yahwistic ethos, at least in the Genesis account of the patriarchal narratives. See 2.4.1 n. 147.

⁶⁹ Moberly (1992a: 87-104).

they made no distinction between the God of the patriarchs and the God of Israel. Even P, who states that Yahweh was not known to the patriarchs, believed this.⁷⁰ Similarly, the significance of circumcision as the sign of the covenant remained the same for both the patriarchs and Israel. Therefore these aspects may be considered not as religious acts but as the theological basis for patriarchal or Israelite faith.

To this end we will deal with the following aspects of the religion of the patriarchs: altars and sacrifices (ch. 2), prayer or calling upon the name of Yahweh (ch. 3), pillars or *maṣṣēbāh*. (ch. 4), tithes (ch. 5), vows (ch. 6), ritual purification (ch. 7). As already noted above, there is a coherence about the theme of the first three aspects, as together they constitute patriarchal worship. Building altars, praying and raising pillars (chs. 2-4) are usually a response to theophanies, thus suggesting they form a patriarchal pattern of worship, while the other three aspects (chs. 5-7) may be described as patriarchal religious practices. The presence of certain sacred trees in Genesis and the significance of Abraham planting a tamarisk will be dealt with under altars and prayer (chs. 2 and 3). This is appropriate here because of Abraham's frequent camping and building altars at places where the holy trees ^{wcy} supposed to have been, and Abraham's calling upon the name of Yahweh following the planting of a tamarisk tree. A tree appears once in the Jacob-cycle but with little or no religious significance. In each chapter, the ancient Near Eastern and Israelite backgrounds will be dealt with first, then the patriarchal traditions will be dealt with comparing or contrasting with the former's traditions wherever relevant.

⁷⁰ P consistently avoids using the name Yahweh in the patriarchal narratives (except twice in the framework); Wenham (1980: 161-62).

Chapter 2

Altars and Sacrifices

2.1. Introduction

As mentioned above, we shall first deal with those aspects related to the patriarchal pattern of worship such as altars and sacrifices, prayer and pillars. Among these, however, altars and sacrifices deserve to be treated first because they are not only attested in all the patriarchal cycles but also they appear to form the core of their worship. Prayer will be dealt with next, because it naturally follows the building of altars in the patriarchal narratives. Thus the idea of prayer embraces the connotation of both worship and the general concept of petition in this thesis. Pillars will be dealt with next because they appear only in the Jacob cycle, though they also indicate Jacob's pattern of worship.

Like in Canaan, the places where the patriarchs erected altars and offered sacrifices were usually the same places where they experienced theophanies.¹ However, we may also find both Mesopotamian and Israelite elements in patriarchal worship, since Mesopotamia was the original home of the patriarchs and since the authors were Yahwists themselves. Therefore we need to paint a broader picture of the ANE and of later Israelite practices in order to see which ones elucidate the patriarchal practices most. Our approach will be, for each of these cultures and for Israel, first to examine the various occasions when sacrifices were offered and the types of sacrifices presented, and then to seek to explain their nature as to how they were viewed and what they were expected to achieve for the worshipper.

However, the occasion, types of sacrifices and ritual procedures in both the ANE and Israel are much more varied and elaborate than in patriarchal narratives. Furthermore, the context of sacrifices in the latter is radically different from in the former, where the places of sacrifices are usually temples and the officiants usually the appointed priests. Consequently, how the sacrifices were viewed and what they intended to achieve in these cultures is also different from that of the patriarchal narratives. In contrast, sacrifices in the patriarchal narratives occur in two contexts, namely formal worship and special occasions. While the former followed a theophany, movement to a new place or long-term encampment, the latter were occasioned by a covenant, a command of God or thanksgiving. Thus our focus on Near Eastern and Israelite materials will be limited to those aspects that will illuminate the occasion and types of sacrifices in the patriarchal narratives, while other aspects may be touched upon in passing.

¹ Cf. Alt (1989: 20f).

2.2. Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East

In what follows we shall examine the occasion, types and nature of sacrifice in Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Hittite and Canaanite cultures in order to compare how they relate to each other and what light they can throw on Israelite and patriarchal sacrifice. The notion behind sacrifice in the ANE seems to be 'offering' or 'giving' something as gift or tribute to a deity.² There are close similarities between the words used for 'incense offering', 'animal sacrifice', 'ritual slaughter' and 'libation' in the Akkadian, Phoenician, Ugaritic, Hebrew and other cognate languages.³ Whether terminological similarity indicates borrowing from one culture to the other or not, it certainly suggests that the practice of sacrifice is common to all these cultures.

2.2.1. In Mesopotamia

Occasion and types: Sacrifices in Babylonia were offered on various occasions, such as: the dedication of a temple,⁴ which probably included the dedication of altars; before battles, after battle in order to give thanks for the help of the gods;⁵ and for healing the sick. In the last case either sympathetic magic was carried out on the sacrificial animals by removing their inward parts, symbolising the removal of sickness,⁶ or they were presented as substitutionary offerings, especially to the gods of the underworld to cause them to give up their claims on the sick. If the king was sick, a human substitute was installed in order that he might draw to himself the evil that had threatened the king, and thus deliver the king 'through his own natural or otherwise induced death.'⁷ Von Soden rightly observes that the ritual sometimes presents a disguised form of human sacrifice.⁸

While elaborate sacrifices were offered during festivals,⁹ daily sacrifices,¹⁰ *sattûku* and *ginû* (both terms meaning 'fixed', 'perpetual'), were attested only for larger cult centres, such as Babylonia, Borshippa, Sippar, Cuthah and Nineveh.¹¹

² Gray (1925: 3ff.); cf. Smith (1927: 244ff.); Yerkes (1953: 25-26); Van Baal (1976: 161-78).

³ *KAI* (214: 15-22); *DISO* (71); *Ug.* (5: 586-88); *TDOT* (4:11); Milgrom (1991: 713ff.) It may be pointed out here that the Deuteronomic use of the word may refer to the festive meal where sacrificial meat is consumed (Deut 12:15,21; 15:21).

⁴ Jastrow (1898: 215, 663; 1905: 225); Oesterley (1937: 56). Incidentally, this has parallels in both the Ras Shamra tablets and the OT (1 Ki 6-8, Solomon's dedication of the temple).

⁵ Jastrow (1898: 224; 1905: 234); Oesterley (1937: 56).

⁶ Jastrow (1905: 350).

⁷ Von Soden (1994: 193).

⁸ Von Soden (1994: 194). Cf. Jastrow (1898: 662); *TDOT* (4:17).

⁹ Jastrow (1898: 676f.).

¹⁰ Presented each morning and evening, but there is only one reference to a noon meal, Oppenheim (1964: 188).

¹¹ Cf. the Pentateuchal institution of the *tamîd*, and its technical usage in Dan 8:11. However, the number of sacrifices vary according to the popularity of the deity and its temple. Jastrow (1898: 667).

The most common type of sacrifices among the Babylonians were the gift-offerings, which included animal sacrifices, libations and offerings of farm-produce. Both kings and commoners made these offerings at sanctuaries on special occasions, either as a direct act of worship to a god or to fulfil a vow. Sometimes the statues of the gods were offered to the temple as gifts, along with costly wood, precious stones and garments.¹² Frequent references to oil and wine in sacrifice suggest that such items represented some sort of sacrifice. Stones in temples, palace foundations, and stones bearing commemorative or votive inscriptions were often anointed with oil, wine or honey.¹³ Jacob's anointing of a pillar, which in the context may suggest the founding of a temple, has close parallels here.¹⁴

Certain texts also suggest that the one who offered the sacrifices was expected to be 'bright' or 'resplendent', probably indicating ethical concerns.¹⁵ Offerings and sacrifices were made even by laymen, although before making an offering they had to wash their hands in ordinary water, whereas the priests washed theirs in running water.¹⁶ As in Israel, certain portions of the sacrificial animal, such as the right thigh or shoulder, the loins and hide, the rump and tendons, and part of the stomach, were reserved for the priest.¹⁷

Nature of sacrifice: Sacrifice were commonly viewed as a food to the gods in Old Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian texts (e.g. the hungry gods in the Epic of Gilgamesh),¹⁸ and mankind was created to provide for their food (e.g. Sumerian and Akkadian myths).¹⁹ It was believed that gods, like men, died and needed nourishment to continue in the afterlife.²⁰ The idea that offerings had to be pure, holy and of first quality is also present in Mesopotamia.²¹

There is no clear concept of a 'burnt offering'²² since the sacrificial meat was usually cooked before it was offered.²³ The deities were viewed in some mysterious way as consuming the offerings, either by looking at them or by having them waved in front of

¹² Jastrow (1898: 669-75); Oesterley (1937: 56-57).

¹³ Jastrow (1898: 664-65).

¹⁴ See chapter 4.

¹⁵ CAD (21: 106). Cf. Jacob's call for purification before sacrifice (Gen 35:1-4).

¹⁶ Oesterley (1937: 58). Cf. the patriarchal practice, the lay Israelite also assisted (Lev 3) the priests while offering sacrifices.

¹⁷ Sayce (1902: 472).

¹⁸ Lambert - Millard (1969: 99); cf. Tigay (1982: 224-27); Hallo (1983: 165-80, especially lines 375-76); Lambert (1993: 194).

¹⁹ Lambert - Millard (1969: 15).

²⁰ Jastrow (1905: 511); cf. Oesterley (1937: 58,59); *TDOT* (4: 16); von Soden (1994: 188).

²¹ CAD (21: 105); *TDOT* (4:17); Jastrow (1898: 661-62); Sayce (1902: 466-67, 471f.); von Soden (1994: 188ff.).

²² CAD (21: 105); *TDOT* (4: 17).

²³ Cf. the Arabs who rarely offer fire-sacrifices. They simply smear the blood of the sacrificed animal on the sacred stone or pour it into the receptacle, *ghabghab*, for the offering. Wellhausen (1897: 116).

their eyes.²⁴ Further, the sacrifices were usually described as pleasing to the gods.²⁵ It is, however, disputed among scholars whether those who offered sacrifice thereby had table fellowship with the gods.²⁶

2.2.2. In Egypt

Occasion and types of sacrifice: The most common of the Egyptian sacrifices were the daily sacrifices²⁷ and incense offerings²⁸ to both gods and deified pharaohs.²⁹ Texts from the tenth century BC and earlier describe daily sacrifices of incense, libations and all sorts of food at Karnak, Thebes and Dendera.³⁰ Public festivals were important occasions when many sacrifices were offered including 'elevation of offerings'.³¹ Sacrifices were also offered at the time of the king's accession to the throne.³²

The sacrificial materials represent both domestic and wild animals and birds, besides various kinds of foods and fruits.³³ The foreleg of an ox is the choicest offering, and geese are the most commonly sacrificed birds.³⁴

Offerings to the dead form a special feature of the Egyptian sacrifice. A number of tomb inscriptions from the Fifth and Sixth dynasties (25th-24th centuries BC)³⁵ describe daily and seasonal (festivals) offerings, but it is not clear if they were meant for the care of the dead or were offered to a deity. The concern of the inscriptions, however, appears to be to pray for their good reception in the land of the dead.³⁶ The texts aim to promote the resurrection and ascension of the dead in order for them to join the company of the immortal gods. The texts are also concerned with the purification of the dead.³⁷ Besides choice food and drink, the offerings include perfume, eye-paint, and sandals for the journey of the deceased. Most, if not all, suggest that they are part of a daily care for the dead.³⁸

²⁴ Oppenheim (1964: 191-92).

²⁵ CAD (21: 105).

²⁶ CAD (21: 105) implies; Oppenheim (1964: 191), *TDOT* (4: 17) deny; *ERE* (9: 33), Dhorme (1949: 231ff.), Oesterley (1937: 58) and Frankena (1961: 199-207) claim.

²⁷ The rituals include the daily services, from opening the temple doors and awakening the deity to the feeding and disposal of the left-overs and finally to closing the doors. Nelson (1949: 201-32; 310-45).

²⁸ It is technically called 'the utterance for striking the fire.'

²⁹ Notable among them are Imhotep and Amenhotep. Lichtheim (1980: 104).

³⁰ *ANET* (325); Lichtheim (1980: 106-8).

³¹ Nelson (1949: 327-29, 331); cf. Lev 23:9-21.

³² *ERE* (11: 32).

³³ *TDOT* (4: 14); *ERE* (11: 32).

³⁴ Cf. Faulkner (1969: 26-27).

³⁵ Funerary texts also occur in the pyramid of King Ibi of Eighth Dynasty, and in the *maššēbāh* tombs of several nobles of the middle kingdom and, sporadically, in tombs of the New Kingdom and the Late Dynastic period down to the Thirtieth dynasty. Hayes (1953: 82-83); Lichtheim (1973: 29).

³⁶ Lichtheim (1973: 15-27).

³⁷ *ANET* (325); Faulkner (1969: 7, 20, 21).

³⁸ Faulkner (1969: 21-40).

Nature of sacrifice: Like the Babylonians, the Egyptians viewed sacrifices as food for the gods. Frequently sacrifices were also viewed as representing the enemies of the gods. At festivals persons representing the enemies of the gods were beaten nearly to death and prisoners of war were slaughtered regularly before the gods.³⁹ In most cases the victim represents both nourishment and the enemy of the god.⁴⁰

With regard to the sacrifices to the dead, there is a clear distinction in presentation between offerings to the dead and offerings to the gods. While there is confession of innocence and affirmation of purity when offering to the gods, offering to the dead contains no such description of the servitor. On the contrary, some of the offerings to the dead were expected to effect purification in order for the recipient to attain resurrection.⁴¹ So the view that the Egyptians did not venerate their dead commends itself so long as the offering to the deified pharaohs does not suggest in itself a cult of the dead.⁴²

2.2.3. Among the Hittites

Occasion and types of sacrifice: Public sacrifices were offered to different gods when the foundations of a new palace were laid.⁴³ The significance of the animal species for the particular gods is, however, not stated. Sacrifices were also made during the festivals, especially a seasonal festival Puruli, and the New Year Festival.⁴⁴ The congregation received a share of food and drink after it has been blessed by the king.⁴⁵

There were three semi-public occasions when the Hittites offered sacrifices. First, substitutionary offerings were made to purify the god, temple and the royal family who were suspected to be contaminated by evil or impurity.⁴⁶ Secondly, when people were dying of pestilence, substitute offerings of a ram or a bull or an ewe or even a human substitute to the enemy land in order to carry away the infection⁴⁷ and to appease the enemy gods.⁴⁸ Third, before battle.⁴⁹ Occasionally, human sacrifice, along with the animals, was made in the case of military defeat. The procedures of such sacrifice^{are} surprisingly similar to the covenant sacrifice in Gen 15:9-18:

³⁹ In the civilised cults of later times many of these barbarities were preserved only in symbolic form. Hayes (1953: 78).

⁴⁰ *TDOT* (4: 15).

⁴¹ Faulkner (1969: 62,103,104 *passim*); Lichtheim (1973: 33f.).

⁴² *ERE* (11: 32), *TDOT* (4:15) and Hayes (1953: 81) imply a cult of the dead among the Egyptians, while Morenz (1973: 204) denies it.

⁴³ *ANET* (358).

⁴⁴ Gaster (1966: 245-46); Gurney (1977: 32).

⁴⁵ Gurney (1977: 33-34).

⁴⁶ *ANET* (346). Cf. the Day of Atonement (Lev 16) in Israel.

⁴⁷ In one of the rituals the infection was transferred to the animal by laying on of hands by the performers.

⁴⁸ In some rituals the technical word for 'scapegoat', *nakkušš*, 'let go, dispatch', was mentioned. Gurney (1977: 48,49,51); cf. *ANET* (347).

⁴⁹ *ANET* (354-55).

If the troops have been beaten by the enemy they perform a ritual 'behind' the river, as follows: they 'cut through' a man, a goat, a puppy, and little pig; they place half on this side and half on that side, and in front they make a gate of ... and in front of the gate they light fires on this side and on that, and the troops walk right through, and when they come to the river they sprinkle water over them.⁵⁰

Human substitution for pestilence and human sacrifice for defeat in a battle may suggest the community's view that extreme calamity requires the costliest sacrifice.

Besides these, private sacrifices were offered on various occasions according to the needs of the individuals, such as against sickness,⁵¹ for moral offences and for the dead. In the case of sickness, a fir tree was planted either side of the temple gate, and the priestess asked the god to deliver the individual from the evil sickness.⁵² In a ritual against impotence, libations and sacrifices were offered, and the priestess made vows to give a house, a pillar or a statue to the deity if the patient became well.⁵³

With regard to moral offences, a bird and a lamb were offered as a peace offering for sin, imprecation and false testimony.⁵⁴ Some texts also mention silver, gold and valuable articles, probably offered as the price for a 'guilt-offering' (*ku-iš Du-at*),⁵⁵ either in place of or in addition to the animal sacrifices, and finally with a declaration of atonement.⁵⁶

As in Egypt, sacrifices to the dead are also attested in Hittite rituals. In a fourteen-day ritual carried out when the king or queen died, an ox was slaughtered and a goat was waved over the body and a libation was poured for the soul of the deceased. Silver, gold and precious stones were weighed in the scales as a price to appease the chthonic deities.⁵⁷ The sacrifices were primarily propitiatory in order that the dead might not pose a threat to the living.⁵⁸

Nature of sacrifice: As in other ancient Near Eastern religions, Hittites viewed sacrifices as food to the gods - the daily, monthly and New Year sacrifices may not be stopped,⁵⁹ and the food and drink dedicated to the gods may not be shared with laymen.⁶⁰

The gifts and propitiatory offerings often formed part of ritual healing by magic. First fruits of fields and yearlings of flocks were especially dedicated to the gods, probably

⁵⁰ Gurney (1952: 151).

⁵¹ *ANET* (348-49).

⁵² Cf. Abraham in Gen 21:33.

⁵³ *ANET* (349-50).

⁵⁴ Weinfeld (1983: 105-6; 106 n.51)); for transliteration and interpretation of the text (KUB xli.11), see Hoffner (1973: 86-87).

⁵⁵ Hoffner (1973: 88) translates it as an offering to 'make it good'. This probably corresponds to the biblical מַנְחָה offering of restitution. Cf. Milgrom (1973: 299ff.).

⁵⁶ Weinfeld (1983: 106-7).

⁵⁷ Sacrifices were also directed toward chthonic deities during a ritual for absolving a house from guilt. Weinfeld (1983: 110).

⁵⁸ Gurney (1977: 62).

⁵⁹ *ANET* (399).

⁶⁰ Gurney (1952: 150).

suggesting their fields and flocks belonged to their gods. Animals were to be without blemish and deformity, and they were more valued if they had not yet mated, again suggesting the gods' requirement for purity (cf. Lev 22:17-25). Animals were sacrificed by cutting the throat and the blood was poured out on the ground. Bread and cheese were broken, but the exact implication of this is uncertain.⁶¹ However, shedding of blood in certain sacrifices became both an offering to the chthonic deities and an agent to absolve a house from blood guilt,⁶² and in some rituals the blood functioned as part of the sharing of a meal to sanctify a covenant.⁶³

2.2.4. At Ugarit⁶⁴

Occasion and types of sacrifice: A well preserved ritual text from the Baal-cycle 'prescribes'⁶⁵ instructions about the offerings during the New Year festival when various types of sacrifices to Baal and numerous other gods were made.⁶⁶ More importantly, these texts also indicate a 'system of classification that specified not only the class of the [required] animal but also its sex'.⁶⁷

While a Hittite ritual describes sacrifices to be offered when the troops had been defeated, a Ugaritic ritual prescribes sacrifice for averting an enemy's attack on the city:⁶⁸

"O Ba'luma, please chase away the strong one from our gate, the warrior from our walls! The bull, O Ba'lu, we shall consecrate, the vows to Ba'lu we shall fulfil, the firstlings of Ba'lu we shall consecrate, the *hitpu*-sacrifice of Ba'lu we shall fulfil, the tithe of Ba'lu we shall pay, we shall ascend the sanctuary of Ba'lu, the paths of the house of Ba'lu we shall walk."

Only vows, firstlings and tithes are mentioned here. These offerings probably include animal sacrifices. Unfortunately, we cannot be certain what the *hitpu* sacrifice means. It may mean just 'offering' or 'food offering'.⁶⁹ We may recall an actual situation when Samuel offered a suckling lamb as a whole burnt offering at the time when the Philistines were attacking Israel (1 Sam 7:9f.). The text seems to draw attention to the time of attack and the sacrifice, as in the Ugaritic text. Further prayer is also mentioned in both

⁶¹ Gurney (1952: 151; 1977: 28).

⁶² Gurney (1977: 29).

⁶³ Gurney (1977: 30).

⁶⁴ With the discovery of a fully developed cult at Ugarit, the Wellhausenian hypothesis that Israel's highly developed cultic system was the mere product of post-exilic theocracy has been severely shaken. Gray (1957: 142). Cf. Weinfeld (1983: 95-129); Anderson (1992: 874). For a detailed argument for the antiquity of P, see Milgrom (1991: 3-12).

⁶⁵ For a distinction between 'prescriptive' and 'descriptive' rituals, see Levine (1963: 105-11).

⁶⁶ *KTU* 1:41; translation from *ARTU* (157,158-65). Several copies of this text are extant, suggesting its importance; Levine (1963: 105).

⁶⁷ Levine (1963: 110).

⁶⁸ *KTU* 1.119: 26-35; translation from *ARTU* (173-74).

⁶⁹ Boyd (1986: 64 n.24).

the texts. There seems to be no antecedent or prescription on this matter in Israel. It is possible that Israel adapted this practice from the Canaanites.

Sacrifice by individuals with regard to childlessness is attested in the legends of Keret and Aqhat. In the former legend, El asked Keret, who was bereaved of all his wives and children, to offer sacrifice in order to receive children. The text mentions ritual cleansing prior to sacrifice and the raising of hands, a symbolic gesture in prayer, and then goes on to prescribe sheep, fowl, bird, wine and honey as sacrificial materials.⁷⁰ Though it is uncertain if a libation offering is meant here,⁷¹ it is rather unlikely that wine would have been mentioned with no motive of a drink offering. Bread loaves and wine are often mentioned in relation to drink offering in the OT.

In the legend of Aqhat, on the other hand, the childless king Dan'el himself offered to the gods 'food', *ylḥm*, and 'drink', *yšqu*,⁷² which were probably 'consecrated oblations',⁷³ in order to find favour with them so that he might obtain a son who would perform, among other things, funerary rites to his ancestral gods. When the gods granted his wish, Dan'el probably offers sacrifices of thanksgiving for seven days.⁷⁴ Later in the legend Dan'el offered sacrifices to the dead ancestors and also to the gods once again, apparently to seek their help to bring Aqhat back from the dead.⁷⁵

We have a number of references to sacrifices and offerings, gifts and presents in the myth of Baal and Anath, but all of them were either demanded by one god/goddess on behalf of another god, or offered by one god or group of gods to another.⁷⁶ Most of these are undoubtedly related to banquets or drinking parties of the gods and seem to have very little to do with the concept of sacrifice from the human point of view.

Sacrifices to the dead at Ugarit are mainly concerned with the royal ancestral cult in which the king and the priests invoked the spirits, or 'shades' of the dead, the king sacrificed to the seven invoked spirits as they disappear, and the priest finally offered a bird.⁷⁷ Sacrifices to the dead are also attested during the New Year festivals, during which

⁷⁰ *KTU* 1.14.ii: 6-26; *ARTU* (194-95). Cf. *ANET* (143). The same process is repeated later in the legend, when Keret awakes to perform the actual sacrifice, *KTU* 1.14.iii:50ff.; *ARTU* [198ff.]. Slaughter and sacrifices also occur again in Keret's funeral banquet, which was ordered by the goddess Athiratu who was angered over Keret's broken vow. He promised (probably to the goddess) gold three times the weight of his would-be bride, Hariya, the Tyrian princess, if he would obtain her in marriage.

⁷¹ Gray (1957: 145); Gordon (1965: 413f.).

⁷² *KTU* 1.17:2-3.

⁷³ *ARTU* (225); cf. *ANET* (149f.): 'oblation'.

⁷⁴ *ARTU* (232). Cf. the biblical peace offerings in Lev 3; 7:11f.

⁷⁵ *ARTU* (262-63, 267ff., 272).

⁷⁶ For instance, the god Radmanu serves to Baal a suckling, a fatling and wine. *ARTU* (3). Anathu tells El that all other gods must bring gifts and presents to Baal because he is the Almighty. *ARTU* (18,53). But Anathu also offers sacrifices at the funeral of Baal; and finally she offers bread and wine to Kotharu on the victory of Baal over Motu. *ARTU* (83,98). But Baal also offers sacrificial meal and wine to his brothers and other goddesses, such as the throne gods, chair gods, vase gods and bowl goddess. *ARTU* (60-61). Even El, the head of the pantheon, sacrifices in his house after advising Yammu to occupy the palace that was originally built for Baal. *ARTU* (26). On another occasion El says that Baal must bring tribute and gifts to Yammu. *ARTU* (33). Presents and bribes were offered to Athiratu by other gods. *ARTU* (50).

⁷⁷ *ARTU* (167-68).

the spirits of the deified kings would rise along with Baal the saviour.⁷⁸ Surprisingly, another text, concerned with the care and honour of the deified ancestors, mentions a peace-offering.⁷⁹ The significance of these offerings, however, is uncertain, although the food for a three day journey suggests that the sacrifices were concerned with the care for the soul's journey in the afterlife.

Sacrifices for moral offences were signified by the two expressions, *ap* and *npš*, 'offerings concerning anger and (sin of the) soul respectively',⁸⁰ that occur alongside number of offerings at Ugaritic. The context in which they occur refers to the ceremonial ablutions of the new moon day:

[bym ḥd]t slḥ npš..., slḥ ap w npš, ⁸¹

Both in Ugaritic and biblical ceremonies, the prince was the officiant for this ritual (Ezek 48:18-25).⁸² Another Ugaritic text that mentions expiatory offerings was concerned with the transgression, *ḥt*, of the people, who had sinned with anger, *ap*, and impatience, *qšrt npš*, and asked for forgiveness for themselves, their king their queen and the strangers living among them.⁸³

Nature of sacrifice: Sacrifices at Ugarit were probably viewed as food for the deities, since the deities themselves were involved in arranging banquets for one another. Besides, the idea of sacrifice both as gift and thank offering is similar to biblical view of sacrifice.

There are many close similarities between the Ugaritic and the Hittite offerings on the one hand, and the Ugaritic and the biblical offerings on the other. As in the Hittite rituals, Ugaritic texts describe burnt-offerings (*šrp*), peace-offerings (*šlm<m:>*), and bird-offerings along with silver and gold, though the latter in the Hittite rituals appear to be the price for a guilt-offering. As in the Priestly code, Ugaritic lists of offerings often make specific mention of 'two birds', (*šrm*), 'doves' (*ynt*), and also 'turtledoves', (*tr*), which remind us of the various occasions when birds and doves were offered within the Israelite cult.⁸⁴ Besides, *'āšām* and *ḥattā't*, the two types of purificatory offerings also known in Israel, many categories were present in Ugarit, suggesting these were not 'peculiarly Israelite innovations.'⁸⁵

⁷⁸ *KTU* 1.41: 35ff.; *ARTU* (163,98 n.428).

⁷⁹ *KTU* 1.43:4ff.; *ARTU* (169).

⁸⁰ Weinfeld (1983: 108).

⁸¹ *KTU* 1.46:1f.; Weinfeld (1983: 108). Cf. the biblical ritual for the new moon day, Num 28:11-15; 1 Sam 20:29.

⁸² Weinfeld (1983: 108-9).

⁸³ *KTU* 1.40:18ff.; cf. the similar biblical idea in Num 15:22-26; Weinfeld (1983: 109).

⁸⁴ Cf. the burnt offering of the birds in Lev 1:14, the dove offered for sin offering, burnt offering, and for the woman's purification after childbirth (Lev 5:17; 12:6); the two birds offered for the lustration of the person with צִרְעָה, and the house cleansed of צִרְעָה (Lev 14:4ff.,49); and those offered for the purification of נֶזֶק (Lev 15:14,19), and the two doves for the *nazir* (Num 6:10). For other categories in Ugarit whose nature cannot be established, see Hillers (1970: 42); Weinfeld (1983: 109); cf. Urie (1949: 79).

⁸⁵ Weinfeld (1983:109). But Urie (1949: 72,80), is doubtful about the nature of *ašm* at Ugarit.

2.3. Sacrifice in Israel

Sacrifice in Israel is too broad a subject to deal with in any detail here. Only an outline of the main occasions, types and nature of sacrifice will be sketched as a basis for comparative analysis between the ANE and Israel on the one hand and between Israel and patriarchal sacrifice on the other.

The various sacrificial offerings in the OT are: the 'burnt offering', *עלה*, the 'peace offering', *שלמים*, the 'cereal offering', *מנחה*, the 'purification offering', *חטאת*, and the 'guilt offering', *אשם*. The non-sacrificial offerings which did not involve either slaughter or burning are the tithe, *מעשר*, the first fruits, *בכורים*, the wave-offering, *תנופה*, and the heave-offering, *תרומה*. In this section we are concerned only with the sacrificial offerings which involved slaughter and partial or complete burning.

Primary attention will be given to the Priestly texts, since the concept of sacrifice and the rules of its performance are the chief concern of them. However, we shall examine other texts at relevant points.

Besides Leviticus, the so called Priestly texts are found in Exodus 25-40 and Numbers. The final form of these texts suggest that the priestly regulations were given within the framework of the Sinai Covenant and in the context of the tabernacle.⁸⁶ The rituals associated with the sacrifices are described in minute detail as to the type of animals required at each occasion, the place of slaughter and the distribution, consumption or disposal of their various parts. This suggests that the entire section comes from a 'Handbook for Priests.'⁸⁷

Occasion and types of sacrifice: Leviticus 1-7 (also Num 5:5-8; 15:22-31) comprises basic rules for how each sacrifice was to be performed, while other Priestly texts describe how these rules were to be applied to different sacrificial rituals performed on different occasions. These different occasions may be categorised, starting from the initiation rituals of the clergy, into: (i) sacrifices at the ordination of the priests and the Levites (Lev 8, 9; Num 8); (ii) sacrifices at the dedication of the tabernacle (Lev 8:10-11; Num 7); (iii) daily, monthly, weekly and yearly sacrifices, *tāmīd*, (Num 28-29); (iv) sacrifices at festivals (Lev 16, 23); (v) individuals' sacrifices on various occasions (Lev 1-7; 12; 13-14; 15).⁸⁸

(i) Sacrifices at the ordination of priests ^{are} unattested outside Israel, while the other occasions have many parallels in the ANE. (ii) Sacrifices and gifts of cultic furnishings of various kinds on the occasion of the dedication of the temple resembles the dedication of

⁸⁶ Anderson (1992: 877).

⁸⁷ Rainey (1970: 487); cf. Milgrom (1991: 2).

⁸⁸ Cf. Anderson (1992: 877).

temples in the ANE.⁸⁹ (iii) The sacrifices, following a cultic calendar (Num 28 - 29), describe the regular sacrifices, in the order of their frequency - daily, weekly, monthly and yearly - required by God at the tabernacle/temple right through the year.⁹⁰ The opening verses, especially 28:2b, suggest that these offerings were viewed as God's food, as in the ANE: קרבני לחמי לאשי ריח ניחח, 'my offering, the food for my offering by fire, my pleasing odour'.⁹¹ But other texts emphatically deny that Yahweh needed food (e.g. Ps 50:7-15).⁹² (iv) The various festivals and special occasions when Israelites offered sacrifices were the New Moon festival (28:11-15), the Passover (Num 28:16 cf. Ex 12; Lev 23:5-8; Num 9:1-14; Deut 16:1-8), the feast of Unleavened Bread (28:17-25 cf. Lev 23:5-8), the Day of First-fruits (Lev 28:26-31; cf. Ex 34:22; Deut 16:10), the Day of Atonement (Lev 16)⁹³ and the Festival of Tabernacles. (v) Besides these, Lev 1-7 (cf. Num 29:39) clearly presupposes that the individual Israelite on various occasions offered sacrifices, such as votive offerings, free-will offerings, burnt offerings, grain offerings, guilt offerings, well-being offerings and offerings after purification from various defilement described in Lev 12-15. We will not go into details of these sacrifices, but we shall discuss them briefly here.

Burnt offering, עֹלָה (Lev 1): עֹלָה, literally 'that which ascends', suggests that the whole⁹⁴ is turned into smoke, וְהִקְטִיר. Sacrifices include a male without blemish from the herd or flock, prepared and made לִיהוָה עֹלָה אִשָּׁה רִיח־נִיחֹחַ, 'a burnt offering by fire, a pleasing odour to Yahweh' (v. 9). The Ugaritic parallel to this sacrifice is *šrp* which occurs fifteen times with *šlmm*, probably equivalent to the Hebrew שְׁלָמִים. While the Ugaritic *šlmm* differs from its Hebrew counterpart, in that the offering can be a bird, cluster of grapes, or oil, the *šrp* is limited to animals as the Hebrew עֹלָה.⁹⁵ The burnt offering is also attested in the Syrian and Hittite rituals. That the purpose of עֹלָה is clearly propitiatory and expiatory is suggested both in the biblical and the Hittite texts.⁹⁶

Cereal offering, מִנְחָה (Lev 2): מִנְחָה can mean 'gift' or 'tribute' for showing reverence or homage and, in political contexts, friendship or submission.⁹⁷ A similar

⁸⁹ Levine (1993: 247,259-66).

⁹⁰ A helpful chart categorising the type and number of animals required for each sacrifice on each occasion is given in Wenham (1981: 197); Ashley (1993: 563). However, the quantity of cereal and drink offerings required for each animal is missing in these lists. Probably the tithes provided for the daily sacrifices, while the princes provided sometimes (Mal 3:10; Ezek 45:18 - 46:15).

⁹¹ Also cf. 'my sacrifices and my offerings' and 'my table' in 1 Sam 2:29; Ezek 44:16.

⁹² Cf. Eichrodt (1961: 141-44); Haran (1961: 286); de Boer (1972: 27-47).

⁹³ For Hittite and Mesopotamian parallels, see above. Further examples may be found in Wright (1987: 15-74); Milgrom (1991: 1072-79).

⁹⁴ Milgrom (1991: 172ff.), suggests that at an earlier stage עֹלָה was designated by the כָּלֵל, 'whole, entire', but this word fell out of use because later the skin of the victim was awarded to the priest. Cf. Urie (1949: 70-71).

⁹⁵ Milgrom (1991: 172).

⁹⁶ Judg 20:26; 1 Sam 7:9 cf. Jer 14:12; 1 Sam 13:12; Wenham (1979: 63); Milgrom (1991: 175-76).

⁹⁷ Gen 32:14,19,21; Judg 3:15,17; 1 Sam 10:27; 16:19; 2 Ki 20:12; also at Ugarit, *UT* 120:1,4; 137:28; in Akkadian *PRU*(4:293); Milgrom (1991: 196).

meaning is also implied in a Babylonian text: 'Did it bring its flour offering to appease the goddess's anger?'⁹⁸ מנחה included both bloody and unbloody sacrifices, which were probably 'whole burnt offerings',⁹⁹ but the Priestly code later limited מנחה to vegetable offerings only, although the old idea of offering it by fire on the altar was still maintained.¹⁰⁰ The cereal offering usually followed the burnt offering. It probably meant to appease or retain favour with God, who granted forgiveness through the burnt offering.¹⁰¹

Well-being offering, זבח שלמים (Lev 3): is 'the general term for animal sacrifice whose meat is eaten by the offerer;¹⁰² שלמים refers to the specific motivation that prompts the sacrifice, a feeling of "well-being".¹⁰³ שלמים may be offered as a thank-offering,¹⁰⁴ votive offering or free-will offering (Ps 56:13-14; Ex 35:29). They were presented on solemn occasions of various kinds, such as festivals (Ex 32:6,8; 1 Ki 8:63f.; 9:25; Amos 4:4), victory in battle (1 Sam 10:8; 13:9), the election of a king (1 Sam 11:13ff.), before war, and at thanksgiving (Josh 8:31; cf. Ps 56:13-14; Deut 12:7; 27:7). The priest received the breast and the right thigh while the rest went to the offerer and his family who consumed it in a state of ritual purity within a stipulated period (Lev 7:11-21; 34,35).

The purpose of שלמים is variously explained as 'fellowship offering',¹⁰⁵ 'concluding sacrifice',¹⁰⁶ or 'gift sacrifice'.¹⁰⁷ It probably means that the sacrifice is offered 'to obtain peace between the worshipper and the deity',¹⁰⁸ but is not a mystical communion with the deity,¹⁰⁹ since this is difficult to establish in the OT.¹¹⁰

Purification offering, חטאת (Lev 4): חטאת, derived from the verb חטא, 'to purify', is synonymous with מזהר and כפר. It always means 'to cleanse, expurgate, decontaminate'.¹¹¹ It is required when an individual or a community commits inadvertent sin (as in Lev 4), or when a person is under the influence of severe impurity (Lev 12-15). The flesh of חטאת offerings whose blood is not taken into the tent of meeting for atonement must be eaten by priests in the holy precincts, because it is most holy, like the cereal offering. The blood of the victims is used to purge the most sacred parts of the sanctuary on behalf of the inadvertent offenders, and even persons (seriously unclean) and objects

⁹⁸ Lambert (1960: 75); cf. Milgrom (1991:196-97).

⁹⁹ Gen 4:3,4; 8:20,21; 15:9-17 (? probably a burnt offering); 22:13; cf. Milgrom (1991: 197f.).

¹⁰⁰ Lev 2:1ff.; 2:2; 6:7ff.; 6:8; 10:12.

¹⁰¹ Wenham (1979: 70).

¹⁰² 1 Sam 3:14 implies that זבח and מנחה have atoning effect.

¹⁰³ Milgrom (1991: 204).

¹⁰⁴ 'Thank offering', תודה, is presented for deliverance from distress and the sphere of death, or as thanksgiving in festivals (Pss 107:22; 22:27; 23:5).

¹⁰⁵ Snaith (1967: 37).

¹⁰⁶ Rendtorff (1967: 133).

¹⁰⁷ From the Akkadian root *šulmānu*; Levine (1974: 16,29ff.).

¹⁰⁸ Urie (1949: 77); de Moor (1970: 117).

¹⁰⁹ *Contra* Smith (1927: 265).

¹¹⁰ Cf. Num 8:7; 19:19; Ezek 25:26; 43:22,26; Ps 51:9; Milgrom (1991: 221).

¹¹¹ Milgrom (1991: 232,253).

which cannot have sinned. This suggests that the very status of impurity in some and the inadvertent sins in others caused the contamination of the sancta and hence the need for its cleansing and so this offering.¹¹²

Reparation offering, זָבַח (Lev 5:14-26;¹¹³ Num 5:6-8): Traditionally זָבַח has been rendered as 'guilt offering', but 'reparation offering'¹¹⁴ or 'compensation offering'¹¹⁵ is more accurate with regard to its function. זָבַח is prescribed for 'sacrilege', מַעַל , in relation to the holy things of Yahweh' (vv 14-19),¹¹⁶ and/or 'sacrilege in relation to oaths' (vv 20-26).¹¹⁷

The זָבַח therefore logically constitutes the restitution of the thing to the owner plus one-fifth of its value, and a ram without blemish, convertible into silver by the sanctuary weights,¹¹⁸ for a guilt offering to Yahweh. The restitution and sacrificial offering alone will not, however, expiate the sinner from the false oath, for which the normal penalty is death.¹¹⁹ But confession will reduce one's intentional crime to inadvertent crime and restitution and sacrifice will expiate the sinner (Num 5:5-8). The idea of confession and the reduction of punishment is evident also in the ancient Near Eastern literature.¹²⁰

Nature of sacrifice: Among the various types of sacrifices in Israel, the burnt offering, which was totally consumed on the altar, comes very close to being viewed as nourishment to Yahweh, but this is difficult to ascertain from the biblical texts. The well-being offering suggests a fellowship of the worshippers with the deity, but not a mystical communion with him.¹²¹ The purification offering provided cleansing to an average Israelite who may be defiled in various ways, and enabled him to access the holy things of Yahweh. The reparation offering achieved similar purification in the realm of the individual's ethics. Thus purification and atonement were ideas common to all the sacrifices so that the worshipper could have continual access to the sanctuary and a 'living intercourse' with God.¹²²

¹¹² Milgrom (1991: 254ff.). For another type of purification offering prescribed in Lev 5:1-13, sometimes called 'graduated purification offering', see Milgrom (1991: 307ff.); others regard it as a poor man's 'purification offering', de Vaux (1961: 419-21; 1964: 92). Rendtorff (1967: 207-10) assigns 5:1-6 to 5:14ff. to make it part of the 'reparation offering', and 5:7-13 to 4:27ff.

¹¹³ 5:14 - 6:7 in English.

¹¹⁴ Milgrom (1976: 13ff.).

¹¹⁵ Snaith (1965: 73-80).

¹¹⁶ For מַעַל and holy things of Yahweh, see Milgrom (1976: 17-18; 44-55; 1991: 321); Wenham (1979: 106). For the Hittite parallels of sacrilege, see *ANET* (207-10); Milgrom (1991: 322; 1976: 29-35).

¹¹⁷ For offences in relation to oaths, see Lev 19:13; Deut 24:6,14,15,17; Ezek 18:12; Prov 20:16); for discussion, see Milgrom (1976: 84-98). For parallels in the ANE, see Driver - Miles (1952: 80ff.); Yaron (1988: sections 40,49); Milgrom (1991: 101).

¹¹⁸ For various interpretations of the idea of the sacrificial animal convertible into silver, see Milgrom (1991: 326ff.). Reparation offerings are prescribed also in the case of the cleansing of a leper (Lev 14:10-28), sexual crime with a slave-girl betrothed to another man (Lev 19:20-22), and for the purification of a nazirite (Num 6:12).

¹¹⁹ Oath violations are punishable by the deity in all ancient Near Eastern cultures; Brichto (1963: 71-76).

¹²⁰ *ANET* (395); from a letter of Amarna, *ANET* (486).

¹²¹ Kraus (1966: 114).

¹²² Pedersen (1940: 359); cf. Kraus (1966: 123).

2.3.1. Comparative analysis

Occasion: With few variations, the occasions for sacrifice in all the Near Eastern cultures are similar. As in Israel, there are daily sacrifices and on special occasions, such as festivals, dedication of temples, laying palace foundations, before and after battles, averting pestilence and healing the sick. There are also sacrifices on various occasions by individuals, such as for thanksgiving or votive purposes, and sacrifices for the dead at regular intervals and on special occasions. However, by contrast, sacrifices for the dead in Israel were condemned, implying that these were viewed as lapses on a popular level. As will be observed, most of these occasions are not relevant to the patriarchal sacrifices, except those offered on special occasions and by individuals for thanksgiving, peace-making and votive purposes.

Nature and purpose: The most common view in the ANE and in Israel was that sacrifice was a gift to the deity¹²³ with the motive being physical or spiritual blessing.¹²⁴ In the physical realm blessing could include victory/success, fertility/posterity or healing/protection. In the spiritual realm it could include ritual purity and moral justice- e.g. the Hittite guilt offering and Ugaritic offering for anger. In the Israelite ritual, however, every offering can be labelled as a gift to God, since this was the dominant motive behind all of them. The burnt offerings and libations were especially so, since they were totally turned into smoke or poured into the ground. The motivation in all types of offerings was not only to gain favour from God but also to seek peace with him and to enact atonement. The *שְׁלָמִים*, *חַטָּאת* and *אִשָּׁם* sacrifices dealt especially with the moral problems of the worshipper as well as being sacrifices, gifts to God. So the idea of inducing the deity by a gift is largely absent in the official cult.

Sacrifice was commonly regarded in the ANE as food for the gods.¹²⁵ Except at Ugarit,¹²⁶ no texts describe sacrificial materials as actually having been eaten by the gods.¹²⁷ They were only waved or presented in front of them before being distributed. The idea of sacrifice as food to God is not entirely absent in Israel. Israel probably understood that in some way sacrifices were appropriated by God, but not physically since God was not allowed a material form.¹²⁸

The idea of sacrifice as a communion meal with God was developed particularly by Robertson Smith, who argued that Arabs, Canaanites and Semites in general believed that god and the worshippers were *commensals* in the sacrificial meal.¹²⁹ This is doubtful

¹²³ Cf. Evans-Pritchard (1956: 282); Bourdillon - Fortes (1980: 23).

¹²⁴ Milgrom (1991: 441).

¹²⁵ Cf. Sauneron (1960: 84-85); Oppenheim (1964: 187-93).

¹²⁶ Ugaritic texts describe gods, even El, as drunken and wallowing in urine and excrement.

¹²⁷ Cf. The story of 'Bel and the Dragon'.

¹²⁸ Eichrodt (1961: 143); cf. Milgrom, (1991: 440).

¹²⁹ Smith (1927: 226f., 269ff.).

among Babylonians, and possible among the Hittites only in festivals.¹³⁰ Sacrifices within banquets were certainly shared together at Ugarit; these were primarily arranged by, and shared among, the gods themselves. In Israel, language and procedures suggest that such views were present, especially at the time of covenant making,¹³¹ where the meal that followed was probably concerned with the presence and fellowship with God, but not in any magical sense. Rather, as Eichrodt notes:

the consuming holiness of his nature constantly breaking into human life further excludes any thought of presuming on the bond of blood-brotherhood ... The power of sacral communion mediated by the sacrifice rests rather on God's declaration that he is prepared to enter into a special relationship with his people and to give them a share in his own life.¹³²

The sacrifice was only a symbol and an occasion for celebrating such a communion. Further, in certain sacrificial accounts any 'union with the deity is expressly denied.'¹³³

The idea that the substitute took the place of the offerer was prominent in the ANE, and some scholars have applied this to Israel also.¹³⁴ Others have argued that the scapegoat which carried off the sin did not even die¹³⁵ and so cannot be a sacrifice, and that the most important part of the ritual, in which a bull and a goat was sacrificed in the sanctuary, was intended to purify the sanctuary and the cultic system rather than the offerer.¹³⁶ Further, Israel's substitutionary offerings were not to the chthonic or enemy gods as in the ANE, but to Yahweh, suggesting that there was no realm that was not controlled by Yahweh and that no sacrifice was required for any one else.¹³⁷ But the idea of substitution and the elimination of evil from the community is similar in both systems.

Sacrifices for moral offences attested at Ugarit and among the Hittites are similar to the biblical עֲוֹנוֹת. Not only the offences, such as sin, sacrilege, imprecation and false testimony, but also the offering prescribed, such as a bird for sin, and another bird for imprecation, a lamb and a bird for false testimony, besides silver, gold and valuable articles as a price for guilt offering, either in place of, or in addition to, the animal sacrifices, are very similar to the way guilt was dealt with in Israel. Further, both in Hittite ritual and in Israel, confession of sin reduced the punishment, the significant difference being that confession was mandatory in Israel.

¹³⁰ But here there is no suggestion of a communion with the deity.

¹³¹ At Sinai, Ex 24:9-11; at the time of the king's accession to the throne, 1 Sam 11:15; 2 Sam 15:12; 1 Ki 1:9; 3:15; when the ark was brought to Zion, 2 Sam 6:17; 1 Ki 8:63; on all these occasions a communion with Yahweh was probably sought by the worshippers, but it was not made possible without the sacrificial atonement for the people.

¹³² Eichrodt (1951: 157). The meal itself was eaten 'before him', not with him; Ex 18:12; Deut 27:7; 1 Sam 2:13-16, Milgrom (1991: 441). Even the meal that followed the Nuer sacrifice has only a 'social significance', Evans-Pritchard (1956: 214-15).

¹³³ Judg 6:18-21; 13:16; Milgrom (1991: 441).

¹³⁴ Cf. James (1938-39: 151-55); Rodriguez (1979: 257-60).

¹³⁵ Pace Rodriguez (1979: 73-74, 303-8).

¹³⁶ Milgrom (1971: 56; 1991: 441); cf. Steinmueller (1959: 556-67); de Vaux (1964: 93-94).

¹³⁷ Cf. Wright (1987: 32-45).

The above analysis suggests that Israel was aware of the ANE cultic practices, with regard to their time (occasion), category (various types of sacrifices) and their general purpose (gift). However, Israel is significantly different in its motivation and in what it expected the sacrifice to achieve. In this sense, sacrifice as atonement for sin is unique to Israel. Sacrifices to the dead and the underworld gods are absent in Israel. It is also evident that temples and priesthood played an important role both in the ANE and Israel and, except in Babylon, that there is hardly any instance where a lay person offers sacrifices in an informal setting. In sharp contrast, sacrifices by lay persons dominate in the patriarchal narratives, with no priest even mentioned. But do patriarchal stories suggest an established cult and other aspects of sacrifice found in the ANE and Israel?

2.4. Altars and sacrifices in the patriarchal narratives

The word זבח/זבחים, sacrifice(s), occurs only twice in the patriarchal narratives (Gen 31:54; 46:1). In neither instance were the type of sacrifices, the animals used and the procedures followed specified, though in both cases the officiant was apparently Jacob himself. There are also two occasions in which Abraham is said to have offered a sacrifice.¹³⁸ In Gen 22:1-14 it is referred to as a 'burnt offering' in which a ram was offered,¹³⁹ and in Gen 15:7:21 a ritual is described in which a heifer, a she-goat and a ram, each three years old, a turtledove and a young pigeon were apparently slaughtered by Abraham to seal a covenant with God (Gen 15:7-21). There are eleven further references to altars built by patriarchs (12:7,8; 13:4,18; 22:9[twice]; 26:25; 33:20; 35:1,3,7),¹⁴⁰ presumably for the purpose of offering sacrifices, though this is not explicitly stated. We shall examine each of these sets of references in the order of their occurrence in the narratives. Thus we will analyse the idea of sacrifice first in the Abraham cycle, then in the Isaac cycle, and finally in the Jacob cycle. We will demonstrate that patriarchal worship, though in some respects similar to worship in the ANE and Israel, is indeed distinct from both, being compatible only with the lifestyle of the patriarchs as portrayed in the narratives.

¹³⁸ No distinction is made in this thesis between 'Abram' and 'Abraham'.

¹³⁹ Further in the story 'wood for burnt offering' and a 'lamb for a burnt offering' get mentioned, suggesting that burnt offerings were a common form of sacrifice with the ancients.

¹⁴⁰ Actual reference to building altars occurs only seven times.

2.4.1. Sacrifice in the Abraham cycle

Sacrifice in the Abraham cycle was probably offered on two types of occasion, namely during formal worship when Abraham built altars at various places he had chanced to camp, following or preceding a theophany, and on special occasions when he had been directed by God to do so. In the former case only altars are mentioned, although sacrifices were most probably involved, but in the latter not only the type of sacrifice but also the place (in Gen 22) and underlying intention are explicitly stated. We shall deal with these separately.

Altars: There are four occasions when Abraham is said to have either built an altar or used an existing altar for the purpose of conducting normal worship. The context and the circumstances surrounding the activity of building altars suggest that sacrifices were involved here and that they were occasions of regular worship compatible with the lifestyle of the patriarchs. We shall examine these different occasions more closely in order to understand how patriarchal worship is distinct from both ANE and later Israelite worship.

1. Gen 12:7

וירא יהוה אל־אברם ויאמר לזרעך אתן את־הארץ הזאת ויבן
שם מזבח ליהוה הנראה אליו:

2. Gen 12:8

ויעתק משם ההרה מקדם לבית־אל ויש אהלה בית־אל
מים והעי מקדם ויבך־שם מזבח ליהוה ויקרא בשם יהוה:

3. Gen 13:4

אל־מקום המזבח אשר־עשה שם בראשנה ויקרא שם אברם בשם יהוה:

4. Gen 13:18

ויאהל אברם ויבא וישב באלני ממרא אשר בחברון
ויבך־שם מזבח ליהוה:

On three of these occasions Abraham is said to have built an altar, ויבן מזבח, and on the other to have used the one that he had previously built. Whilst in the ANE and Israel the occasion and purpose of sacrifices were usually 'prescribed', and often the whole process of a particular sacrifice was elaborately 'described', in the case of patriarchs, except on two occasions (with Abraham), no prescription of materials or occasion is mentioned. This makes it difficult to determine the nature and purpose of sacrifice in the patriarchal narratives. Consequently many scholars deny that sacrifices were involved with patriarchal altars, although the very word for 'altar', מזבח, meaning 'place of slaughter', suggests that sacrifices were probably involved with the patriarchal altars. So the following basic questions with regard to these texts are in order: Why did Abraham build altars? What did he do with them? and what did the author of Genesis think that he did?

Why did Abraham build altars? The text states that Abraham built altars at a place near Shechem, between Bethel and Ai, and by the oaks of Mamre at Hebron. Assuming for the present that Abraham built altars for the purpose of offering sacrifices, we seek the occasions and the reasons for Abraham as an individual to have undertaken such an actions. At least two occasions may be found when Abraham built altars: in response to a 'theophany' (12:7), and when he 'moved his tent' (12:8; 13:18), but there appears to be no reason for Abraham to have done this if he had been visiting an existing cult place.

Although it was commonly thought in the ANE that the place where a deity manifested itself was hallowed by its presence,¹⁴¹ this point should not be emphasised so sharply here, since Abraham is not said to have built an altar in Haran where the narrative implies that Yahweh had appeared to Abraham and made extravagant promises (12:1f.). There is also no mention of theophany when he built altars at Bethel and Hebron (12:8; 13:18). In these instances it appears that it was because Abraham moved to a new place that he built altars. On the other hand, he did not always build altars when he moved to a new place. For instance, there is no mention of an altar either when he first moved to Shechem before God appeared to him or when he moved his tent to Egypt, presumably in stages, since he made several stops on the way to and from Egypt (13:3). He probably would have stopped at Hebron, where he would later build an altar, at Beer-sheba and elsewhere. This suggests that movement to a new place was not in itself the reason for building altars, but probably rather the intention to settle down for a longer period was.¹⁴² Alternatively, building altars may have established a claim to the land promised, since there is no evidence of patriarchs building altars outside Canaan, even though they often moved and dwelt outside it. Thus there is no strict pattern that theophany or movement to a new place was always followed by building altars. Nevertheless, it may be generally true to say that theophanies made people respond in some way to their experience. Responses varied, but in most cases some means of honouring the deity was involved: either building an altar, raising a pillar or offering a sacrifice.¹⁴³ It is of course probable that sacrifices were also offered in the first two situations.

When the patriarchs intended to settle down at a place for a long period they built altars. This suggests that patriarchal altars followed their tents,¹⁴⁴ that is their worship pattern was adapted to their wandering lifestyle. There is no suggestion here, contrary to the assumption of many scholars (see below), that patriarchs made use of existing Canaanite cult centres or that they founded new cult centres, though it is true that some of

¹⁴¹ *ERE* (11:34); Alt (1989: 20f.).

¹⁴² Cf. Albertz (1994 : 36).

¹⁴³ Cf. Isaac's identical response to theophany, 26:23ff.; but Jacob's response was a pillar, not an altar, Gen 28:17,18; 35:9-14; and Gideon's and Manoah's response to theophany was neither an altar nor a pillar but a sacrifice on a rock at the place of theophany, Judg 6:18-24; 13:19-23.

¹⁴⁴ Westermann (1985: 156-57).

these places were indeed Canaanite cult centres during the second millennium or became important cult centres in later Israel. In the ANE either places of theophany tended to become established cult centres, or it was at cult centres that theophanies were usually expected, whilst the patriarchs seem to have attached no permanent importance to these locations as they kept moving from place to place. In what follows we shall examine the claim that the patriarchs made use of existing cult centres or founded new ones.

Some have argued that the places where Abraham built altars (Gen 12:6-7; 13:4,18) were already sacred places, as suggested by the use of *מקום*, 'the place', and *אלון מורה*, 'the oak of Moreh', or *אלני ממרא*, 'the oaks of Mamre'. This assumption has carried the day from the time of Gunkel onward,¹⁴⁵ probably for two reasons. First, these scholars were working within the framework of the 'history of religions' school which assumed that Mosaic religion evolved from an inferior, if not animistic, religion that preceded it. The second reason, which gives credence to the first and is suggested by the biblical texts themselves, is that Yahweh was not known by the patriarchs (Ex 6:3 P). For these two reasons it appeared legitimate to scholars to seek a type of primitive religion behind patriarchal practices, and *מקום* and *אלון* provided possible hints to confirm their assumptions. However, it has not been explained so far how P, claimed to be the latest source, knew that Yahweh was not known by the patriarchs while the earlier sources, J (and E) assume that they did. On the other hand, if P was early, why did J (and E) not follow his cue? This indicates the problem of dating and of the interrelationship between the sources.¹⁴⁶ If P was late, the most plausible explanation may be that it was P's theological judgement that Yahweh was not known to the patriarchs because the cultic practices in which the patriarchs were involved did not conform with the Yahwistic norms. P saw that J believed that Yahweh was also the God of the patriarchs. Thus P shared the theological position of J and E but not their historical view that the patriarchs knew Yahweh.¹⁴⁷ This may explain P's avoidance of patriarchal cultic practices, except circumcision, in his account of patriarchal history.¹⁴⁸ If J was entirely responsible, according to the source critical analysis, for recording the cultic practices of the patriarchs,¹⁴⁹ and made no

¹⁴⁵ Gunkel (1902: 147); Procksch (1924: 98); Skinner (1930: 246); Kidner (1967: 115); Westermann (1985: 153-54).

¹⁴⁶ Wenham (1980: 162).

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Moberly (1992a: 79-104). Moberly thinks that all the writers of Genesis, J, E and P, were aware of the fact that the patriarchs did not know God as Yahweh, but these writers did not make a distinction between Yahweh and the God of the fathers because they believed that Yahweh was the God of the fathers. However, the Genesis sources themselves do not suggest that J and E knew the distinction between the God of the patriarchs and Yahweh. This raises another query of whether J and E, as revealed in Genesis, really shared the Yahwistic ethos; if so they would not have been so casual in their use of the divine name in relation to the patriarchs who had not known Yahweh. Only P could be said to have been a true Yahwist who was consistent with his knowledge that the patriarchs knew God only as El Shaddai. Cf. Wenham (1980: 161-62).

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Wenham (1980: 163).

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Wenham (1980: 163).

distinction between the patriarchal God and Yahweh, did he believe or know that the places where the patriarchs built altars were already cult centres? We shall turn to this issue now.

Though it is possible that מקום suggests a holy place, it is not certain whether the author used it in a technical sense. In Gen 22:3-4 it probably has such a meaning, suggested both by the context and the identity of the specific 'place' where Abraham was to offer sacrifice, and in the Deuteronomic expression, 'the place that Yahweh will choose', the word almost certainly had this sense. In itself, however, מקום may not necessarily carry a sacred connotation, for it is also used in its basic sense of *a place* in Gen 39:20 and 40:3. The word is found in a similar construction in the immediate context of Gen 13:4: אל-מקום המזבח אשר-עשה שם, 'to the place where he had made an altar'. If the author had meant a sacred place, it would have been sufficient to say 'between Bethel and Ai, to the מקום', since the altar, which was as good as a sanctuary, was already there.¹⁵⁰ Further, the fact that the author describes Abraham as building an altar suggests at least that there was no existing altar, or that the existing altars were not good enough for the wayfarer to offer his worship. In any case, a cult place without an altar or with a defunct one was an anomaly. This is further confirmed by Gen 13:4, where Abraham is said to have 'called upon the name of Yahweh', a technical expression for normal worship (cf. Gen 4:26), which we shall discuss more fully in the next chapter. The author, however, suggests that there was no need for Abraham to build an altar because the previous altar was still there and he could conduct his worship there. Further, even in Gen 12:8, Abraham is said to have 'called upon the name of Yahweh' immediately prior to building an altar, which may indicate that he prayed to God or, more likely, that with the altar in the background he conducted worship, probably with sacrifices. If this was the case, then Abraham acted here as priest, which again suggests that the place was not equipped with any cultic personnel. While the situation of cult in early second millennium Canaan is unclear, the later Ugaritic texts indicate a highly organised cult, with the king or royal family firmly in control. It is possible to think that this may have also been the case during Abraham's time, if the story of Melchizedek has any historical value. It thus seems unlikely that the author used מקום as a technical word for a sacred place.¹⁵¹ If the places where Abraham built altars lay outside the settled townships, as the author portrays it, the other details of patriarchs pitching their tents where they intended to settle for a while fits well with the whole story, suggesting that this was a family altar compatible with the lifestyle of the patriarchs. We shall consider the implications of the archaeological data for this matter below.

The presence of the oak of Moreh, אלון מורה, at places where the patriarchs often camped is claimed as further evidence to indicate the prior sanctity of the place. This probably has more claim to religious connections than the word מקום. Targum Onqelos

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Cassuto (1964: 323-24); Wenham (1987: 279).

¹⁵¹ So Delitzsch (1888: 381); Cassuto (1964: 323-24); Aalders (1981: 271-72).

renders אֵלֹן as 'plain', 'valley', in all of its occurrences in Genesis,¹⁵² probably to suppress the idea that the patriarchs engaged in what was later associated with pagan cults. מורה literally means 'teacher', thus the phrase may mean 'oak of the teacher', or 'the oak where oracles may be obtained'.¹⁵³ In six references to oak-like trees in Genesis, three different Hebrew forms, אֵלֹן, אֵלֶה and אֵלֹן, are used,¹⁵⁴ but only in two instances were altars associated with these trees, while twice burial occurred under them (foreign gods and Deborah's body). Nevertheless, the form אֵלֹן seems to have had religious associations in all its occurrences in Genesis and Judges.¹⁵⁵ In Judg 9:6 the leaders of Shechem make Abimelech king by the אֵלֹן and מצב at Shechem. The association of the 'pillar', מצב, with the oak and the crowning ceremony of Abimelech suggests the existence of a tree-shrine, still with the practice of receiving oracles, outside the city. Opinion is divided concerning whether it is the same tree that is mentioned in Gen 12:6.¹⁵⁶ In view of the presence of a number of temples in and around Shechem, it is not always easy to correlate the biblical texts with the archaeological evidence.¹⁵⁷ The earliest settlement at Shechem is attested in the Chalcolithic period (4500-3200 BC). By the early Middle Bronze period (1900-1750 BC), Shechem had become an important strategic and political centre according to certain Egyptian inscriptions, with the temple area an open place outside the city, but there is no archaeological evidence of an open-air shrine in this period. If Abraham is to be dated during this period he could not have used an already existing open air shrine.¹⁵⁸ In the light of these many possibilities, our best guide is a plain reading of Gen 12:6 which may be taken to indicate that Abraham built his own altar at the place where he camped, that is at the oak near Shechem. The text does not assign any importance to the oak.

Abraham also built an altar at a spot between Ai and Bethel, where he also pitched his tent. Here, unlike a previous occasion, Abraham is said to have 'called on the name of Yahweh' (Gen 12:8). As we have argued above, his building of an altar suggests that there had been no altar beforehand, which in turn suggests that there had also been no shrine there. Further, the author specifically states that the place where Abraham pitched his tent and built his altar was neither in Bethel nor in Ai but between them, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. While there have been problems with the identification of Ai,¹⁵⁹ Bethel

¹⁵² 12:6; 13:18; 14:13; 18:1. The Vulgate follows this rendering in 12:6 only.

¹⁵³ Cf. 'the palm of Deborah', Judg 4:5.

¹⁵⁴ אֵלֹן: 12:6; 13:18; 14:13; 18:1; אֵלֶה: 35:4; אֵלֹן: 35:8; There is only one other form, אֵלֶה, which occurs only in Jos 24:26. RSV renders all these forms as 'oak(s)'.

¹⁵⁵ This form occurs ten times in all, four times in Genesis (as shown above) and twice in Judges. In the other four occurrences it refers to a landmark or boundary marker, Deut 11:30; Jos 19:33; Judg 4:11; 9:37.

¹⁵⁶ Haran (1978: 50-51, n.12) and von Rad (1961: 157) think it is not the same. But the majority of commentators and archaeologists think that the tree of Gen 12:6, 35:4, Deut 11:30; Jos 24:24 and Judg 9:6,37 are the same; cf. Westermann (1985: 154).

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Terrien (1970: 315-18); Soggin (1987: 189-93).

¹⁵⁸ Toombs (1992: 1174-86, especially, 1179-81); cf. Wright (1968: 1-35).

¹⁵⁹ Usually identified with Et-Tell, one and half miles east of Beitin, although its identity has been disputed since it contained no remains between the Early Bronze Age and the Iron Age; Mazar (1990: 331f.).

is usually identified with Beitin, ten miles north of Jerusalem. An open-air shrine from the mid fourth-century BC, a pillar *in situ* from MB I and II, and a temple from the 19th century BC have been found at Beitin, suggesting that Bethel was already a cult centre during patriarchal times. There is also evidence that it was continuously occupied until the late sixth century BC,¹⁶⁰ but it is not appropriate to identify the place Abraham pitched his tent with Beitin, nor is it possible to think, with Gunkel,¹⁶¹ that Abraham went from Shechem to Bethel to found another cult centre. Unlike Shechem, there is no mention of any form of oak at this place during the time of Abraham, but in Jacob's time an oak, אֵלֹן, is said to have existed near Bethel, for Jacob is said to have buried Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, there. We shall discuss this when we come to discuss the Jacob cycle.

Abraham also built an altar 'by the oaks of Mamre at Hebron', בְּאֵלֵי מַמְרֵי אֲשֶׁר בְּחֶבְרוֹן. As in earlier cases, the building of an altar suggests that there was no shrine already established at this place. As at Shechem, however, this place is identified by the 'oaks¹⁶² of Mamre'. While the single oak in 12:6 is qualified by 'Moreh' ('teacher'), here they are qualified by 'Mamre'. Gen 14:13 implies that they either belonged to, or were named after, an Amorite called Mamre. But elsewhere Mamre is identified with Hebron or a place nearby.¹⁶³ Since no reference to Mamre occurs outside Genesis, it is difficult to elucidate these references. It is possible that the name Mamre was originally that of a person, a tribal chief, after whom the grove of trees was named,¹⁶⁴ and it later survived as a place name. It is doubtful, however, that its absence outside Genesis reveals that later authors suspected it of being associated with a syncretistic cult. The growth of legends around the name/place of Mamre does not prove that it was a sacred site during patriarchal times.¹⁶⁵ There is no archaeological evidence of occupation at Mamre in the second millennium.¹⁶⁶

Of the three places where Abraham is said to have built altars, only Bethel shows clear evidence of a shrine existing before and during the time of the patriarchs, but Gen 12:8 clearly denies that Abraham built his altar at Bethel. There is therefore insufficient evidence to assert that the places where Abraham built altars were already sacred places.

¹⁶⁰ Kelso (196:1-3, 20-21, 45-46).

¹⁶¹ Gunkel (1902: 142).

¹⁶² LXX has the singular, 'oak', τὴν δρυν, so also Syriac. Procksch thinks that the plural in the MT is a rabbinic correction in order to hide the sacred tree. This is possible in view of 14:13; 18:1. However, the same logic should apply to Deut 11:30 where the plural is used. But Deut 11:30 refers to the oak at Shechem which is singular at 12:6 and 35:4. Then, why did the scribe leave them uncorrected when they certainly give sacred associations to the tree? De Vaux (1965: 292), thinks that the story in 18:4,8 demands a singular 'oak', but if we accept that 'oaks of Mamre' was a grove named after Mamre, the singular 'oak' in 18:4,8 could be explained as the particular tree under which the transactions took place. See below.

¹⁶³ Gen 18:1; 23:17,19; 25:9; 35:27; 49:30; 50:13.

¹⁶⁴ Speiser (1964: 97); Aalders (1981: 280); Haran (1978: 53f.); cf. Driver (1948: 154).

¹⁶⁵ Pace de Vaux (1965: 292f.).

¹⁶⁶ At Hebron, however, there is evidence of occupation from 3000 BC and a city wall throughout the Middle Bronze period, but it was unoccupied during the entire Late Bronze period until the Iron Age I. At Mamre a sanctuary was attested only during the entire monarchical period. Also remains of the late Roman and Byzantine period were found in both places. Mazar (1990: 332f.); cf. Vos (1977: 174-75).

An alternative view is that the places where the patriarchs built altars later became sanctuaries, so that the patriarchs may be viewed as founders of ancient cult centres.¹⁶⁷ Those who follow this line of argument obviously affirm, directly or indirectly, that the places were not already sacred. However, the patriarchal stories themselves provide witness to the fact that the places where patriarchs built altars were considered special or awesome in some sense by the patriarchs themselves. This is implied in Abraham's return to the place where he had previously built an altar. In Jacob's case, he first recognised the 'awesomeness' of the place, then promised to build a temple there, and finally was directed by God to return to Bethel where God had first appeared to him. Thus the patriarchs built altars following a theophany or at places to which they had newly moved. From the authors' point of view, Israel regarded these places as sacred because their fathers had received revelations there. It is quite possible that some of these places were Canaanite cult centres when Israel took them over, but the sanctity attached to them was not seen (at least by the authors of Genesis) as having derived from their having been Canaanite cult centres but from the fact that their patriarchs had already worshipped in those places.

In summary, the occasions for building altars are very different for the patriarchs from those apparent in the ANE and in Israel. In the latter case, sacrifices were largely corporate, and were made chiefly during festivals and other public occasions; individual sacrifices were mainly for/after healing, occasionally votive and sometimes for sin or guilt. Further, the place of sacrifice was always at the sanctuary, except for certain healing rituals, and usually by a cult functionary. In this way, patriarchal altars were unique. They are, however, compatible with Abraham's wandering lifestyle, since there was no established cult or priest involved. But what about the nature of the altars, that is, what did Abraham do with his altars?

What did Abraham do with his altars? Opinions are sharply divided here. Some think that patriarchal altars were memorials,¹⁶⁸ while others believe that the patriarchs offered sacrifices on them as part of their worship.¹⁶⁹ The word altar, מזבח, occurs about four hundred times in the OT and there are very few instances where its purpose is ambiguous. For instance, the 'altar of wood' in Ezek 41:22 is later described as 'the table that is before Yahweh', השלחן אשר לפני יהוה. It is not certain if this was an altar, the altar of incense, the 'table of the Presence', or more probably 'an altar-like table'.¹⁷⁰ Nor is its function clear. Two other instances, where מזבח probably means a 'memorial altar' occur in Ex 17:15 and Judg 6:24. In the former case, it certainly stood for the

¹⁶⁷ Keil (1878: 167); Dillmann (1897: 15); Cassuto (1964: 325-26).

¹⁶⁸ Delitzsch (1888: 382,393); Procksch (1924: 98); Cassuto (1964: 328-29); Aalders (1981: 271-72,175); for Westermann (1985: 255-56), they are memorials as well as nomadic journey markers. For Skinner (1930: 246), following Procksch, there is no sacrifice in J.

¹⁶⁹ König (1919: 452); Rowley (1967: 24); Wenham (1987: 280). Haak (1993: 164) implies that except in Gen 33:20 and 35:7, sacrifices were offered on other occasions.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. 1 Ki 6:20; Ex 30:1-10; Lev 24:5-9. Cooke (1936: 451-52); Taylor (1969: 262).

memory of Israel's critical victory over the Amalekites, and the naming and the sign on it (v 16) suggest that it was intended as a memorial. But it is unclear why it was called an altar, since elsewhere memorials were usually stones (e.g. Jos 24:25; 1 Sam 7:12).¹⁷¹ Gideon's altar in Judg 6:24 was probably intended as a witness to the fact that there was still peace between him and God, and that he would not die even though he had come into direct contact with the divine being.¹⁷² There is only one other case (Jos 22:10,34) where it is explicitly stated that a particular altar was not meant for the usual sacrifices and offerings. The whole narrative in Jos 22:10ff., however, only proves that altars were usually meant for offering sacrifices.¹⁷³ None of these cases can be compared to the patriarchal altars. Haak includes two of the patriarchal altars (Gen 33:20; 35:7) with the memorial altars just discussed, but this is unhelpful.¹⁷⁴ Further, on two occasions (12:8; 13:4) it is explicitly stated that Abraham 'called upon the name of the Lord' when he built an altar or visited one previously built. This phrase, ויקרא בשם יהוה,¹⁷⁵ is considered to be a technical term for worship as in Gen 4:26.¹⁷⁶ It is doubtful, however, whether the author meant that pronunciation of the name exerts a mystic influence on the deity,¹⁷⁷ or that it represented a petition or praise to the deity.¹⁷⁸ More probably it was 'an umbrella phrase for worship', suggesting that 'Abram worshipped in a regular formal way,' including 'most obviously prayer and sacrifice.'¹⁷⁹ Further, archaeological evidence from the Chalcolithic period at En-Gedi¹⁸⁰ and from Bronze Age Megiddo (several levels), Ai, Shechem, Hazor and Gezer¹⁸¹ amply show the remains of ashes and animal bones at *all* places where different kinds of altars were identified. Therefore the cryptic statements that the patriarchs built altars and called upon the name of the Lord most probably suggest that they not only offered sacrifices but also worshipped God in accordance with their lifestyle.

Sacrifices: Abraham's sacrifices, however, on two other occasions (Gen 15; 22) appear to be similar to those in the ANE and Israel. The occasion, the species of victims and the procedures of offering were all prescribed by the deity himself.

¹⁷¹ 'Whether these constructions were memorials which the author calls "altars" or whether they were altars which later authors attempted to legitimise by assigning an acceptable function is not clear,' *ABD* (1992: 164). Cf. Snaith (1978: 330-35); Van Seters (1980: 232).

¹⁷² This altar probably commemorates sacrifice.

¹⁷³ Cf. Snaith (1978: 331).

¹⁷⁴ *ABD* (1992: 164).

¹⁷⁵ See ch. 3.4.

¹⁷⁶ Gunkel (1902: 148); Aalders (1981: 272); Westermann (1985: 156-57); Hamilton (1990: 378).

¹⁷⁷ Pace Skinner (1930: 127).

¹⁷⁸ The phrase is used to seek an answer from the deity in 1 Ki 18:24; 2 Ki 5:11; Isa 64:6; Joel 3:5; Zech 13:9; Ps 116:4; Lam 3:55. It is used in doxology in Isa 12:4; Zech 3:9; Pss 80:19; 105:1; 116:13,17; cf. Hamilton (1990: 378).

¹⁷⁹ Gen 4:26; 21:33; 26:25; Zeph 3:9; cf. Wenham (1987: 116,281).

¹⁸⁰ Ussishkin (1971: 29).

¹⁸¹ Ottosson (1980: 63-65; 99-101; 128-30); cf. Haak (1992: 165-66).

Gen 15:7-12,17: There is no consensus on the origin, composition and date of the material in Gen 15.¹⁸² In keeping with our main aim, we shall look into the occasion and nature of the sacrifice apparently offered by Abraham. The occasion clearly seems to relate to Abraham's present situation of childlessness and may be compared to those of Keret and Dan'el in Ugaritic texts we have considered above. Even Abraham's worry seems less about land than about childlessness, an 'unmitigated disaster in the ancient world'.¹⁸³ This was certainly true with Keret and Dan'el, for whom having no son meant no heir to the throne and no fertility or prosperity in the land, since the king, being sacral, mediated divine blessings to humanity. Further, no son meant no care-taker in old age, and more importantly none to perform the funerary rites, since this was the son's responsibility. The presence of these ideas in Israel is doubtful, but the idea that one's name must continue after death and that only a son could facilitate this is commonly assumed, and is reflected in the law concerning levirate marriage.¹⁸⁴ Abraham's problem, however, clearly concerned his need for an heir to his property, and probably also someone to carry on his name after his death. The sacrificial ritual that Abraham performed, however, was unlike those of Keret and Dan'el which concerned the need for children, being rather concerned with the promise of land.¹⁸⁵ Both the species and ages of the victims were carefully prescribed as in the Priestly texts of Leviticus: a heifer, a she-goat and a ram, each three years old, a turtledove and a young pigeon. Was this ritual a legal formality, or does it reveal something about Abraham's religion? Are there parallels to it either in Israel or in the ANE?

There are no complete parallels to Genesis 15 in any known ANE text, but different aspects may be found in texts from various periods from the first and second millennia BC. In a Neo-Assyrian text concerned with a treaty between the Assyrian king Asshur-nirari V and Mati'-ilu, vassal-king of Arpad, the latter cuts up the sacrificial lamb and says:

The head is not the head of a spring lamb, it is the head of Mati'-ilu, it is the head of his sons, his magnates and the people of [his lan]d. If Mati'-ilu [should sin] against this treaty, so may, just as the head of this spring lamb is c[ut] off, and its knuckle placed in its mouth, [...] the head of Mati'-ilu be cut off, and his sons [and magnates] be th[rown] into [...]¹⁸⁶

A comparable Aramaic text from Sefire states:

[Just as] this calf is cut in two, so may the wives of Matî'el be cut in two, and may his nobles be cut in two!¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² The majority of scholars, following Wellhausen, have assumed that Gen 15 was composed of two independent narratives, vv. 1-6 and 7-21, and have given up attempts to assign the material to any known sources. For a history of exegesis of Gen 15, see Kaiser (1958: 107-26); Van Seters (1975: 249-53).

¹⁸³ Wenham (1987: 334); cf. *ANET* (149f.).

¹⁸⁴ Gen 38:8-10; Num 27:4; Deut 25:5-10; 2 Sam 18:18.

¹⁸⁵ Westermann (1985: 216ff.).

¹⁸⁶ Hess (1993: 62).

¹⁸⁷ Hess (1993: 61-62).

In both these examples dismemberment of the victims, though only one in each case, forms part of the treaty that the vassal makes before his overlord. The divided animal illustrates the fate of the vassal if he violates the words of the treaty.¹⁸⁸ These examples are probably more relevant to Jer 34:17-20, where a similar substitutionary principle operates for those who disobey the terms of Yahweh's covenant.¹⁸⁹ In Gen 15, however, there is neither the idea of substitution nor the implication that Yahweh accepts the possibility of being torn into pieces if he failed to keep his promise to Abraham.¹⁹⁰ On the other hand, divine oaths generally take the form: 'As I live, says Yahweh.' Thus there is no idea of a self-imprecatory oath on the part of God as has been assumed by several scholars.¹⁹¹ Only the dismemberment of the victims yields any parallel with Genesis 15.

However, the Alalakh Tablets from the first half of the second millennium BC contain two parallels which have closer similarities to the ritual in Gen 15. Both texts describe the swearing of an oath in the context of a covenant-making:

Abba-AN swore an oath of the gods to Yarimlim and he cut the neck of one lamb (saying): (May I be cursed) if I take what I have given you.

The neck of the sacrificial lamb in the presence of Niqmepuh was cut.¹⁹²

Several parallels have been drawn between Gen 15 and the Alalakh texts. First, both texts concern land grants. Secondly, the grants involved an obligation of a servant to his master, and it is the granter taking the oath. And thirdly, the sacrifice of animals and their dismemberment formed part of the property grants.¹⁹³ Thus, despite the common theme of land grants, the animal rite in the latter is unique. Many aspects of the ritual, such as the number of animals, Abraham's driving away of the birds of prey hovered over the carcasses, his sleep during the ritual, and the smoke of fire that passed through between the dismembered parts of the animals, have no known parallels in any ancient Near Eastern texts.¹⁹⁴ Consequently, clues to the interpretation of the biblical rite must be sought elsewhere, probably from Israel herself, that is from the general categories of Israel's rituals, as suggested by Wenham. Thus the slaughtered animals may represent Israel, the birds of prey the enemies of the pagan nations, Abraham's actions his attempts to protect his people, and God's walk his commitment to the covenant to preserve Israel.¹⁹⁵

The meaning of the ritual, therefore, is not confined to a legal understanding of a treaty between two parties. Rather, it probably also has religious significance for the

¹⁸⁸ McCarthy (1978: 94); Hamilton (1990: 432); Hess (1993: 61-62).

¹⁸⁹ A Hittite ritual, which we have already noted above, tells of a similar procedure when the army was defeated in a battle. Except for the dismemberment of the victims, it is hardly relevant to our text. Cf. Hamilton (1990: 432).

¹⁹⁰ Snijders (1958: 271ff.); Hess (1993: 62-63).

¹⁹¹ Speiser (1964: 112-13); Westermann (1985: 228); Hasel (1981: 61-78).

¹⁹² Hess (1993: 57,58); cf. Wiseman (1958: 124-29); Draffkorn (1959: 94-97); Hamilton (1990: 430-31).

¹⁹³ Weinfeld (1970: 184-203); Hess (1993: 57-58).

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Wenham (1987: 333).

¹⁹⁵ Wenham (1982: 134-37; 1987: 332-333); cf. Hamilton (1990: 433f.).

relationship between Abraham and God and between Abraham's descendants and their God. The occasion for the ritual probably also has more than one purpose, namely Abraham's childlessness and his landlessness about which God had been making promises, though not yet with an oath as here. Therefore it appears reasonable to suggest that this ritual was a ratification of that oath, a once-for-all action, and that it probably forms part of Abraham's religion, not in the sense of a cultic practice that Abraham would repeat often, but of a common cultic practice that was used for the specific purpose of ratifying a relationship. A sacrifice may be assumed here, but there is no hint of worship; indeed the devotee falls asleep during the ritual!

Genesis 22:1-19: The story of Isaac's sacrifice is problematical historically, ethically and theologically.¹⁹⁶ But we shall focus only on the occasion and the nature of sacrifice from the perspective of the final author and see how these throw light on the religion of Abraham.

This is the clearest instance of a 'burnt offering' sacrifice of a ram in the patriarchal narratives. The occasion, created by God himself in the form of a testing (נסה) of Abraham, was special, because it involved a human victim - there was never a prescription of human victims for a burnt offering or, for that matter, any other type of offering in Israel. There are, however, several instances of human sacrifice in Israel (Judg 11:31-40; 21:6), and there could have been many at the popular level of worship, especially during the reigns of some kings who openly encouraged pagan worship (2 Ki 17:17). Perhaps the rejection of the human sacrifice already lies behind the law of redemption of the firstborn son by animal sacrifice (Ex 22:28; 34:20). But in any case Gen 22 is not a polemic against human sacrifice, marking the transition from human sacrifice to animal substitution.¹⁹⁷ It is clear from the earliest biblical stories that animals from the flock or products from the field were the natural materials for sacrifice (Gen 4:3-4; 8:20). Even Isaac's innocent query assumes that a lamb was an appropriate animal for a burnt offering. It is uncertain whether the narrator added this note to increase the tension in the story or whether it really reflects Abraham's normal practice with which Isaac was familiar. Further, as noted above, pagan human sacrifices were usually offered at the worshipper's own initiative, in an extreme emergency or in order to appease an angry or inattentive god (cf. 2 Ki 3:26-27). None of this, however, is suggested in the text. The occasion for this sacrifice therefore remains an unusual one, that is to test Abraham, this motif pervading the whole story.¹⁹⁸

Further, this is the first time that a burnt offering is prescribed in the patriarchal narratives. At Ugarit, the victims are varied, including a bird, a cluster of grapes and oil, but again, no human victims were prescribed. In Hittite rituals, however, human victims were prescribed on two occasions, namely defeat in a battle and pestilence. In both cases,

¹⁹⁶ For a review of research and literature, see Westermann (1985: 351-54).

¹⁹⁷ Westermann (1985: 354); Sarna (1989: 392f.).

¹⁹⁸ Westermann (1985: 354-55).

the human victims were sacrificed or sent away (in the case of pestilence) along with other animal victims, but in neither case were they called a burnt offering. Thus there are no real parallels to Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac either in Israel or in the ANE. Once again, therefore, this reveals the distinctiveness of Abraham's religion.

As to the nature of sacrifice, the author describes Abraham as if preparing for a normal sacrifice of a burnt offering, suggested by the wood, fire and knife. These things were not mentioned on earlier occasions, probably because the sacrifice took place in family surroundings, so there was no need for such preparation. But now this sacrifice to God was to involve a three-days journey¹⁹⁹ from home to a 'place', *מָקוֹם*, which God would show him. *מָקוֹם* is mentioned thrice (vv. 3,4,9) and 'worship', 'altar'²⁰⁰ and the 'mount of Yahweh' (vv. 5,9,14)²⁰¹ associated with it suggest that it was a familiar place, possibly considered to have been sacred to the author and his reader. But the fact that Abraham needed to take wood and fire and had to build an altar suggests that there was no existing or functioning sanctuary there. So once again the preparation, the place and the manner of sacrifice offered suggest that it was peculiar to the patriarchal lifestyle and inextricably related to their personal piety. The non-mention of Sarah in the whole episode reinforces this point. Also the direct command of God to Abraham and the intervention of the angel are typical of God's dealings with the patriarchs elsewhere in the narratives. Westermann's suggestion that the story arose during the later period of monarchy, when the idea of the 'fear of God' or 'testing of the people of God' acquired significance for the people of God,²⁰² is possible but uncertain, since it involves importing foreign ideas into the text while leaving several aspects inherent in the text unexplained. The author of the story wanted to portray how God tested Abraham and how Abraham obeyed God, in spite of the fact that all God's promises depended upon Isaac's survival.

Thus Abraham's building of altars and calling upon the name of Yahweh, though sounding comparable to worship anywhere with the ANE or in Israel, was in fact different from any such pattern of worship. The texts of Genesis suggest that there were no established cult or cultic personnel involved at the places where he built altars. Neither the presence of the 'oak-like' trees nor the use of *מָקוֹם* in these contexts require that they were already 'sacred sites'. On the other hand, the occasion for building altars and the intention behind them suggested by the texts reveal a pattern in which the patriarch built these altars either in response to a theophany or as a result of moving places, which in turn suggests

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Gilgamesh; *ANET* (75).

²⁰⁰ It is only here in the patriarchal narratives that an altar is described with a definite article. Does it suggest a restoration of an existing altar? So Sarna (1989: 392).

²⁰¹ While the 'mount of Yahweh' can be identified with Zion (2 Chr 3:1; Jubilees 18:13; Josephus, Targums and Talmud; cf. Isa 2:3; 30:29; Mic 4:2; Zech 8:3; Ps 24:3), the 'land of Moriah' where this mount was located could not be identified with any certainty. The etymology of 'moriah' is uncertain as 'none of the ancient versions transliterates *moriah*'. And Jerusalem is not a three-days journey from Beer-sheba. Sarna (1989: 391-92).

²⁰² Westermann (1985:355-56).

that these altars were for the purpose of worshipping God in accordance with his wandering lifestyle as an alien in the land. This is very different from the cultic practices of both the ANE and Israel, in both of which sacrifices were highly organised, largely corporate, and offered chiefly during festivals and other public occasions; individual sacrifices were mainly for or after healing, and occasionally votive or for removing sin and guilt. Further, the place of sacrifice was always the sanctuary, except at certain healing rituals, and it was usually conducted by a priest. In these ways patriarchal altars were unique.

Abraham's apparent sacrifice in Gen 15 and the special sacrifice in Gen 22 must be regarded as special occasions. Though the specification of sex and types of animals and sacrifice on these occasions resemble the Israelite and ANE practices, the pattern is still compatible with the patriarchal lifestyle. On both these occasions neither a priest nor an established cult place was involved. The transaction was between God and the patriarch only. Both represent a specific relationship of the patriarch with God and do not reflect the patriarch's pattern of worship. It is possible that some of the concerns expressed in them were from the editors and not truly patriarchal, but their identification depends more on speculation than firm evidence.

2.4.2. Altars in the Isaac cycle

There is only one reference to building an altar in the Isaac-cycle (Gen 26:25). The majority of scholars consider Gen 26 to be a unity, probably coming from J.²⁰³ The story of Isaac is eclipsed in Genesis by the Abraham narratives on the one hand and the Jacob narratives on the other. Indeed, most scholars regard the whole of the Isaac story as an introduction to the Jacob-Esau cycle,²⁰⁴ as suggested by its starting with the struggle between Jacob and Esau in their mother's womb (25:22ff.). Thus Isaac appears to be insignificant compared to the figures of Abraham and Jacob, but nevertheless forms an indispensable link between them. The story-line is firmly linked to the two larger narratives of Abraham and Jacob. The introduction of Laban into the story of Isaac's marriage already anticipates Jacob's future relationship with Rebekah's family. As for lifestyle, religion and the patriarch's relations with others, there are many parallels between Abraham and Isaac which suggest that the traditions arose from a similar milieu. For instance, the famine and wife-sister motif (26:11 // 12:10-20), wealth and quarrels between the patriarch's herdsmen and others (26:12-22 // 13:2-10), separation (26:23 // 13:11-12), divine promise of descendants (26:24 // 13:14-17), moving and altar building (26:25 // 13:18), good relations

²⁰³ Westermann (1985: 423); Wenham (1994: 188).

²⁰⁴ Wenham (1994: 172).

with foreigners (26:26-31 // 14) and a foreign king blessing the patriarch (26:29 // 14:19-20).²⁰⁵

Thus the religious activities of Isaac, though not as numerous as those of Abraham, are quite compatible with his lifestyle as portrayed in the narratives.²⁰⁶ He prays for his barren wife (25:21),²⁰⁷ and builds an altar at Beer-sheba following a theophany and a move to a new place (26:25). The occasion for building an altar is similar to that of Abraham who built altars during his wanderings through the land (12:7,8; 13:3,18). Like Abraham, Isaac builds an altar and 'calls on the name of Yahweh' after a theophany and a move to a new place, from Gerar to Beer-sheba. Patriarchal altars followed their tents with Isaac as with Abraham. However, unlike in Abraham's case where the use of מקום or the presence of 'oak-like' trees suggested the prior sanctity of the places, here there is no suggestion that there was a Canaanite sanctuary at Beer-sheba.²⁰⁸ But in view of Abraham's earlier associations with Beer-sheba (21:33; 22:19)²⁰⁹ and of Jacob's receiving a theophany later at this place and responding with sacrifices (46:1ff.), it is reasonable to assume that this place had a tradition as a patriarchal sanctuary. That Abraham not only made his home at Beer-sheba but also 'called upon the name of Yahweh' there suggests that Abraham conducted formal worship as he had previously done elsewhere. Abraham's action here differs only in respect of his 'planting a tree' instead of 'building an altar' as in earlier cases. The lack of the mention of an altar, however, probably suggests that no sacrifices were involved. The fact that Isaac built an altar clearly suggests that there was no altar existing, and the fact that Isaac called upon the name of Yahweh suggests that formal worship with sacrifices was involved. The two questions we asked above in relation to Abraham's altars, namely 'why did Abraham build altars?' and 'what did he do with them?', are relevant even here. Apart from a formal act worship, compatible with the patriarchal lifestyle being involved here, it is possible to suggest that building an altar at

²⁰⁵ Wenham (1994: 187).

²⁰⁶ Westermann (1985: 426).

²⁰⁷ See ch. 3.

²⁰⁸ Smith (1927: 181-82.) suggests that among the Semites a special sanctity was attached to the place of 'seven wells', Beer-sheba. However, whether the tradition was about the place of 'seven wells' or 'well of the oath' is not clear. In the light of Abraham's treaty with Abimelech (Gen 21:27-32) the latter meaning seems more likely. Cf. Dillmann (1897: 136-37); Westermann (1985: 349).

According to archaeological studies, the deepest stratum represents an unwallled settlement during the time of the judges. A fortified city appears only during the period of the monarchy, so that the 'city of Beer-sheba' in Gen 26:33 must be regarded as an editorial note. If there was a settlement during the time of the patriarchs, it should have been in the valley near the water source, but the patriarchal stories themselves do not suggest a Canaanite settlement prior to their arrival there. Cf. Aharoni (1973: 110-13); *EAEHL* (1975: 162,168); Herzog (1980: 12-28); Fowler (1982a: 7-11).

²⁰⁹ Abraham planting a tamarisk tree at Beer-sheba is discussed in ch. 3.

Beer-sheba, the southernmost border of the promised land,²¹⁰ may have represented not only a claim to the land but also a legitimation of the sanctuary for later Israel.²¹¹

Therefore, as in the case of Abraham, Isaac built an altar following a theophany and with the intention of staying there for a while. As there is no evidence of a Canaanite settlement prior to Isaac's arrival there, and since Isaac himself was the officiant in the cult, it is reasonable to think that Isaac's worship is compatible with the patriarchal wandering lifestyle. While the idea of worship itself is common with that of the ANE and Israel, the pattern of patriarchal worship is distinct from both the ANE and Israel, where temples, priests and cultic calendars played an important role.

2.4.3. Altars and sacrifices in the Jacob cycle

Not only altars but also pillars are frequently associated with Jacob. We shall, however, focus on his altars and sacrifices, pillars being considered in chapter 4. On two occasions Jacob is said to have built altars (Gen 33:20; 35:7), and on two other occasions he is said to have offered sacrifices. If the latter occasions presuppose the building of altars, do the former presuppose sacrifices? We shall deal with these questions separately and see how these cultic practices reveal the nature of the patriarch's religion.

Altars (Gen 33:20; 35:1,3,7): The verb used previously for building altars, בנה, is replaced by נצב, 'to erect', in 33:20, and עשה, 'to make', in 35:1,3, though the author returns to בנה in 35:7. Some scholars think that the change of verb in 33:20 indicates that Jacob had originally erected a pillar as he did on other occasions (28:18; 31:45; 35:14,20), but that a later hand changed it to מזבח because pillars were proscribed in later Israel. It is further argued that only בנה and עשה referred to altars, never נצב,²¹² but others think that the use of נצב does not prove that Jacob erected a pillar. Further, נצב is also used for setting up a pile of stones elsewhere (2 Sam 18:17).²¹³ However, given the similarity of the form between מצבה and מזבח, it is more probable that a scribe mistook one for the other than that he made an intentional correction. In any case מזבח would not have entirely removed Jacob's association with pillars, since Jacob elsewhere is clearly described as having raised pillars. While it is possible that מצבה was original, the context in 33:20 suggests a more formal worship with a period of settlement, for which מזבח would be more appropriate than מצבה. In view of Jacob's settlement at Shechem, Westermann's remark on ch. 12:8 that altars and tents went together with patriarchs also holds good here.²¹⁴ In view

²¹⁰ Cf. the expression 'from Dan to Beer-sheba', Judg 20:1; 1 Sam 3:20; 2 Sam 3:10; 17:11; 24:2,15; 1 Ki 5:5)

²¹¹ Pilgrims resorted to oracles from Beer-sheba in eighth-century Israel (Amos 5:5; 8:14). Skinner (1930: 327).

²¹² Dillmann (1897: 293); Procksch (1924: 378); Skinner (1930: 416); de Pury (1975: 442); Westermann (1985: 529); *BHS* note.

²¹³ Delitzsch (1850: 217); Wenham (1994: 301).

²¹⁴ Westermann (1985: 156-57).

of Jacob offering sacrifices on other occasions (31:54; 46:1), it is plausible to think that Jacob offered sacrifices on this altar.

Once again our previous observation that patriarchs built altars when they intended to settle down at a place for a while is confirmed by Jacob's actions at Shechem. The text clearly states that Jacob built his altar in the place he had bought from the natives to erect his tent. For the author this altar was none other than Jacob's own, just as were Abraham's and Isaac's. It is not clear, however, if Jacob had intended to offer sacrifice on this altar - Abraham and Isaac 'called upon the name of Yahweh' when they built altars, but this phrase is significantly lacking here. On the other hand, it is said that Jacob named the altar in Gen 33:20 as **אל אלהי ישראל**. What is the meaning of naming the altar? Is it compatible with the life and experience of the patriarch? What did the author think of it?

In the light of the practice of Abraham and Isaac, it is reasonable to think that Jacob built this altar in order to worship God, because it followed a theophany and a movement to a new place, despite the temporary stop at Succoth. Thus the naming of the altar does not necessarily undermine the function of the altar as a place of sacrifice. But it probably adds an extra element to it, in that Jacob had a special reason for building this altar besides using it for formal worship. The immediate context suggests that the name of the altar was to reflect Jacob's own experience with the God who met him in his crisis and even changed his name (32:29). Such naming of altars was not unusual in Israel.²¹⁵ In this sense, this altar may also have represented a 'memorial' of Jacob's experience, and 'Israel' in the name may refer to Jacob and not to the people 'Israel'.²¹⁶ If the combination **אלהי ישראל** refers to 'the God of Israel' as in other cases, then it should be noted that 'the God of Israel' usually refers to Yahweh, not El. Therefore it is doubtful, as some scholars have argued,²¹⁷ that the naming was programmatic for an author who was describing the religious struggles of Israel after the settlement when the worship of the God of Israel had replaced the cult of El, since after the settlement El, as the supreme God of Israel, was less an issue than was Israel's loyalty to Yahweh. In any case, El's importance was already waning in the Canaanite pantheon toward the end of the second millennium, and El was never as serious a contender to Yahwistic faith as was Baal. Thus it is more plausible to think that the patriarch, who did not know Yahweh, affirmed that El was his God, than to attribute this statement to later Israel. If the author was Yahwistic, it would contradict his faith to describe a religious stage in Israel when the Canaanite El was the God of Israel. Therefore Jacob's altar at Shechem should be regarded as compatible with the lifestyle of the patriarch and as having been intended not only for a memorial, but also for offering worship and sacrifices.

²¹⁵ Cf. Gen 35:7; Ex 17:15; Judg 6:24; Ezek 48:35. Sarna (1989: 232 n.15).

²¹⁶ Cross (1973: 49); Sarna (1989: 232);

²¹⁷ Kapelrud (1966: 46-47); cf. Eissfeldt (1956: 35); Westermann (1985: 529-30).

Both archaeological evidence²¹⁸ and biblical tradition indicate that there was more than one shrine at Shechem during the time of Israel's settlement (Jos 24:26; Judg 9:4,6,37,46). The present text, however, states that Jacob camped 'before the city', פני העיר (33:18), as was the usual practice with other patriarchs. As we have argued above, there is no evidence of a shrine outside the city during the patriarchal period, and it is difficult to prove that the patriarchs worshipped at an existing shrine.²¹⁹

Jacob is also said to have built an altar in Bethel at the direction of Yahweh (35:1-7). Three issues may be immediately identified in this passage: the occasion, preparation and building of the altar. First, the occasion for building an altar is clearest here of all the patriarchal altars. Although Abraham was commanded to offer his son as a burnt offering, which inevitably assumes the building of an altar, only here is there an explicit command to a patriarch to build one. So Abraham, Isaac and even Jacob built altars as part of their practice of worshipping God, but here the occasion was prompted by God and the text suggests that it was associated with the specific theophany to Jacob at Bethel.²²⁰ Thus both the place to build this altar and the occasion are made clear to Jacob as never before. Nevertheless, there are some features shared with the previous occasions, for which the texts presuppose that there were no altars already existing there and that the patriarchs were the sole cultic officiants. Further, if the occasion was to fulfil Jacob's previous vow at Bethel, the context and the circumstances fit quite well with the overall Jacob story, Jacob having already been reminded of his forgotten vow while still in the service of Laban (31:13) and commanded to return to his native country.²²¹ Jacob's initial response to this reminder (35:3) is also suggestive of a recollection of his vow and God's part in it, as God had kept Jacob safe from the wiles of Laban and the attacks of both Esau and the Shechemites. Jacob returns to the promised land, but not to Bethel, to fulfil his vow. In fact when Jacob finally arrived at Bethel to worship God, there is no mention of a fulfilment of the vow.

Secondly, the ritual preparation of purification and parting from foreign gods before worship, though not part of God's direction, is unique to this particular instance. That such preparation was not only a necessary preliminary before presenting oneself at the sanctuary but also a very common custom in the ANE, has already been observed regarding Keret and others.²²² Here our focus will remain on Jacob's altar and whether it is compatible with his lifestyle and religion as portrayed in the Genesis account. The occasion and the circumstances described in the story suggest that the altar built by Jacob was compatible

²¹⁸ Cf. Wright (1965: 123-38); Campbell - Wright (1969: 104-16).

²¹⁹ Cf. n.158 above.

²²⁰ Cf. Dillmann (1897: 302f.); Westermann (1985: 551-53) Wenham (1994: 321-23).

²²¹ Here Jacob may be compared to Keret who forgot his vow to Anath. Cf. Skinner (1930: 423); Wenham (1994: 323).

²²² Cf. Gunkel (1902: 336); Procksch (1924: 381-82); von Rad (1961: 331-32).

with the lifestyle of Jacob. If so, what did Jacob do with his altar? This leads us to our third point, the altar.

Jacob arrived at Bethel **אל בית-אל** ויבן שם מזבח ויקרא למקום אל בית-אל. But unlike at Shechem, where the altar received the name, here it is the place that received the name, **אל בית-אל**. Such a place name, which had already been given by Jacob on his earlier visit, is strange, and the reason given, that it was because God had revealed himself to him there when he had fled from his brother, does not help much either.²²³ However, God's reminder to Jacob of his encounter with him at Bethel, together with Jacob's recollection of the incident, confirms that this altar was the result of the vow made by Jacob when he had first met with God (28:20-22),²²⁴ though this is not stated explicitly. The elaborate preparations before they reached Bethel also suggest that this was not only for presenting themselves before God but also to worship him. Altar building in relation to fulfilling a vow certainly suggests sacrifices. Thus, as in the case of Shechem, the naming of the place only adds an extra aspect to the worship, but does not conflict with its sacrificial aspect. Therefore it is legitimate to suppose that Jacob's altar involved sacrifices.

The place of Bethel has an unbroken tradition of having a shrine from the third millennium BC. As argued in chapter 4 below, the place of Jacob's altar should be distinguished from the site of the traditional shrine which had previously been called Luz. The new name given by Jacob to the place of his altar was probably extended to the traditional site so that the name Bethel then applied to the whole place.

Sacrifices (Gen 31:54; 46:1): Whilst Jacob's altars implied sacrifices, there are two occasions when Jacob is explicitly said to have offered sacrifices - one following a covenant between him and Laban, and the other when he heard that Joseph, whom he thought was dead, was still living. In the covenant between Jacob and Laban it was Laban who sought to make this treaty, probably because it was his interests that were under threat. We have parallels to such treaties in Genesis itself. Abimelech had sought to conclude a covenant with Abraham (Gen 21:22-24) because he realised that Abraham was a force to reckon with since God was with him,²²⁵ but Abraham seized this opportunity to settle the dispute in which Abimelech's servants had seized Abraham's wells, probably violently or illegally. The covenant took the form of swearing and exchange of gifts, as was customary in treaties and covenants.²²⁶ Though not mentioned, it is quite likely that the covenant ended with a meal just as was the case later when Abimelech sought to make a similar covenant with Isaac (Gen 26:26-31 cf. Ex 24:11; 2 Sam 3:20f.). These are similar

²²³ Among the suggested are: 'Bethel', LXX, Syriac, Vulgate, Westermann; 'El is in Bethel', Jacob (1934: 662); a similar title, 'Ilu-bayt-ifi' is also found in an Assyro-Tyrian treaty, Speiser (1964: 244). But Sarna's (1989: 240) suggestion, 'the God of Bethel', that is, the one whose associations with Jacob were repeatedly bound up with Bethel, is probably more appropriate to the context.

²²⁴ For Jacob's vow, see 6.4.

²²⁵ Wenham (1994: 92).

²²⁶ 1 Ki 15:19. Wenham (1994: 93).

to the Jacob-Laban covenant, in that in each of them a superior recognises the rising power of the inferior, the superior seeks a treaty, the inferior accepts the terms, both parties swear an oath of mutual non-aggression, and they share a meal together.²²⁷ By contrast, there is no mention of sacrifice in the covenant ceremonies of either Abraham or Isaac, though it is possible that Isaac's feast might allude to it.²²⁸ The practice of holding sacrificial meals is widely attested in the second millennium BC in the ANE and among Semitic nomads. Thus one cannot assume with Gunkel and others that the Genesis covenants are etiological stories.²²⁹

The covenant between Jacob and Laban appears to be more of a religious nature. This is confirmed by each swearing by his own deity, who is called to act as judge if either of them should violate the treaty. Only Jacob is said to have offered sacrifices on this occasion, probably because Laban at that time would not have had the wherewithal to do so. The word used for sacrifice here and in 46:1 is זבח, which is a general term for sacrifice. The priestly regulations apply this term, combined with שלמים, to the particular sacrifice of 'well-being offerings' (Lev 3; 7:11-21,34,35) which are made as thanksgiving, votive and free-will offerings.²³⁰ As we have noted, the Ugaritic *šlmm* probably refers to the 'peace between the worshipper and the deity', and the priestly שלמים has a similar meaning that 'peace is meant to be achieved' through it. The context of the Jacob-Laban treaty certainly fits such a meaning. It is, therefore, likely that a זבח שלמים was involved here.

The other occasion when Jacob offered sacrifices was when he was about to go down to Egypt after hearing that his beloved son was still living. As in 31:54, זבח is used on this momentous occasion. If the priestly זבח שלמים is any guide here, it is quite likely that Jacob offered sacrifices as a thanksgiving for Joseph whose life had been preserved, the plural זבחים possibly suggesting the number of sacrifices made. Usually building or erecting an altar or pillar followed a theophany, but here the order is reversed. Thus it is probable that Jacob sought guidance through his sacrifices before leaving for Egypt.²³¹ 'Such a move as Jacob is undertaking requires divine sanction, the more so in that to leave Canaan is to retreat from the promised land.'²³² It is possible that the patriarchs sought guidance within their usual worship which included sacrifices, though not by examining the parts of the sacrificial victims as in Babylon.

Thus Jacob's altars at Shechem and Bethel seem to have had more than one purpose, but only the altar at Shechem was similar to those of Abraham and Isaac, because they were built either in response to a theophany or due to a move to a new place. Yet

²²⁷ Cf. McCarthy (1964: 182); Sarna (1989: 221).

²²⁸ So McCarthy (1964: 184).

²²⁹ McCarthy (1964: 185,182).

²³⁰ Cf. Driver (1948: 289).

²³¹ Cf. Balaam's (Num 23) and Babylonian sacrifices as a means for guidance.

²³² Wenham (1994: 440).

Jacob's altar at Shechem had an extra feature, namely that it was also named, probably as a memorial to Jacob's recent experiences.

Jacob's altar at Bethel is unique amongst the patriarchal altars, since it was demanded by God, promised by Jacob as part of his vow, and marked by unusual ritual preparations on the part of the patriarch and his family. It was also unique in the sense that the naming of the place was added to the ceremony, suggesting that this altar, besides being used for sacrifices, was also used as a memorial to Jacob's renewed allegiance to God.

Of all the patriarchs, only Jacob is said to have offered 'sacrifices' twice, once to seal the covenant between Laban and him, and once to thank God for Joseph's life and to seek guidance for his move to Egypt. In all this, Jacob's altars and sacrifices, whilst having certain parallels in the ANE and Israel, are unique and compatible only with his wandering lifestyle and with the religion of the other patriarchs. Yet among the patriarchs, Jacob's religious practices are distinct from those of others. Further, unlike Abraham and Isaac, Jacob's usual response to theophany was not to build an altar, but to erect a pillar.

2.4.4. Cult of the dead

Several scholars argue that certain of the patriarchal sacrifices, funerary and burial customs imply a practice of the cult of the dead as in the ANE and Israel. We need to examine this issue to present a comprehensive picture of patriarchal religious practices.

A cult of the dead in the ANE, as discussed above (2.2), involved propitiating the deceased through sacrifice, ritual and magic. These practices reflect a belief that the dead seek an afterlife which their living kin can provide through these rituals. Further, the rituals, *were* also intended to ensure that the deceased would be benevolent, not malevolent, to their descendants. Thus in practice the deceased are treated as part of the family and community, and their approval is sought on important matters of the life of the family or community.²³³ We need to examine the biblical evidence, especially the patriarchal narratives to see if any of their sacrifices or funerary and burial customs involved a cult of the dead.

Death, מוֹת, is spoken about and described as normal and apparently thought of as the cessation of life and activity and a discontinuity of relationships with the living.²³⁴ Burial is recorded for Sarah (Gen 23), Abraham (25:9), Deborah (35:8), Rachel (35:19 cf. 48:7), Isaac (35:29), and Jacob (50:13). All except Deborah and Rachel were buried in the family grave at Machpelah, as were also Rebekah and Leah (49:31). The family graves and the desire to be buried with one's ancestors may indicate not only a belief in a kind of afterlife but also in an 'ongoing communion with one's deceased relatives.'²³⁵ The formulaic phrase 'gathered to his people', נִאֲסָף אֶל-עַמּוּ, added in the case of Abraham,

²³³ Levine (1993: 472).

²³⁴ מוֹת in its verbal and nominal forms occurs 67 times in the patriarchal stories. Cf. Gen 23:2; 37:33ff.; 38:12, etc. Cf. Bailey (1979: 47-61); Alexander (1986: 41-46).

²³⁵ Spronk (1986: 240-41).

Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob (25:8,17; 35:29; 49:33), and elsewhere used only of Moses and Aaron, might indicate joining one's relatives in the afterlife.²³⁶ Thus the burial practices of the patriarchs suggest that they believed in some kind of continuation of life after death. For this reason the texts seem to be interested more in a proper burial than in any cult of the dead. This is confirmed by the family tombs²³⁷ and the desire for proper burial in later Israel.²³⁸ The archaeological studies of Early, Middle and Late Bronze Age tombs seem to suggest the idea of family tombs.²³⁹ Do family tombs mean care or veneration of the dead? Many scholars think that the presence of jewellery, clothes, weapons, sometimes furniture, pottery and especially bowls and jars connected by a hole outside indicate probable care for the dead, but others strongly contest this interpretation.²⁴⁰ At Ebla, possibly also at Hazor and Byblos, royal cemeteries were found connected to the temple dedicated to Reshep, a god of the nether world, suggesting not only the care for the dead but also their veneration.²⁴¹ Occasionally bones of domestic animals and fish were also found.²⁴² It is possible, as many scholars think, that these grave-materials either originally belonged to the deceased²⁴³ or were supplied later by their relatives who believed that the dead must be gratified with food and some of their most cherished possessions.²⁴⁴ It is possible that certain grave-materials and installations of pipes or conduits suggest the nourishing of the dead or even the cult of the dead in Palestine, but some think that archaeological evidence is inconclusive 'without additional literary evidence'²⁴⁵ as we have in case of Ugarit and Mesopotamia. In the latter case the offerings were intended to be a nourishment to the dead as well as to secure favours or blessings for their relatives.²⁴⁶ In the light of these observations, let us examine the relevant Genesis texts.

Gen 23, 37:34,35 etc. Although this chapter is mainly concerned with Abraham's purchase of the cave of Machpelah for Sarah's burial, some scholars interpret it as Abraham's stake in the promised land.²⁴⁷ Others see here a link between burial, land ownership and ancestral cult.²⁴⁸ Still others argue that it is the Priestly writer's polemic against the ancestral cult 'as there are no ritual acts, no future hope of an after-life: death is

²³⁶ Some scholars argue that this phrase meant secondary burial, e.g. Meyers (1970: 2-29). Cf. Alfrink (1948: 118-31); Illmann (1979: 43-45); Johnston (1993: 88-90).

²³⁷ Jos 24:30, 32; Judg 8:32; 16:31; 1 Sam 25:1; 2 Sam 2:32; 17:23; 21:12-14; 1 Ki 2:34; Isa 22:16.

²³⁸ 1 Ki 14:11; Isa 14:4-23; Jer 16:4; 22:19; Ezek 29:5; cf. De Vaux (1961: 56ff.); Spronk (1986: 238).

²³⁹ Mazar (1990: 98ff., 213f., 277f.).

²⁴⁰ At Ugarit besides such tomb installations, a special term for the pipe or conduit, *arūtu*, or *knkn* is attested. Pope (1981: 161); cf. Astour (1980: 228); Spronk (1986: 142-45); Lewis (1989: 97); Bloch-Smith (1992a: 108; 1992b: 220-24). Contrast Johnston (1993: 83-84); Pitard (1994: 20-37).

²⁴¹ Spronk (1986: 139-41).

²⁴² Horwitz (1987: 251-55).

²⁴³ 1 Sam 28:14 and Ezek 32:27 may indicate that the dead were buried fully clothed.

²⁴⁴ Hartland *ERE* (4: 428, 443-44).

²⁴⁵ Spronk (1986: 141, 258).

²⁴⁶ Cf. Spronk (1986: 145-49); *KTU* 1.161; 1.6.vi:45-49; 1.113; cf. Lewis (1989: 7-10, 31). Bayliss (1973: 115-24); Finkelstein (1966: 95-118).

²⁴⁷ Von Rad (1965: 245); Eichrodt (1967: 218); Westermann (1985: 376).

²⁴⁸ Brichto (1973: 9-12).

regarded as a [sic] impenetrable frontier.’²⁴⁹ However, the last mentioned view seems to be an overstatement. First, it is doubtful if Gen 23 can be unequivocally established as from P, since scholars widely differ on this matter.²⁵⁰ Secondly, it is almost impossible to think that there were no ritual acts at the death scene (23:2). סָפַד is almost exclusively used for mourning for the dead, and בָּכָה is used both for weeping in general and for mourning for the dead. For Westermann, the uses of these two words together is probably ‘based on a fixed expression (also in Ezek 24:23)’. He continues: ‘The further addition of the verb וִיבֹא (“he went in”) designates what takes place as a ritual action.’²⁵¹ This might involve other traditional mourning customs, such as rending garments, disheveling hair, cutting the beard, scattering dust on the head, fasting and refraining from washing and perfumes.²⁵² Therefore it is almost certain that ritual mourning was involved in Gen 23.

But does this mean that the cult of the dead is also implied here? Lewis argues that the usual mourning rites which lasted for seven days (Gen 50:10; 1 Sam 31:13; 1 Chr 10:12) involved a ritual descent into the underworld in order to bring back the dead from the clutches of death or to invoke the ancestral shades.²⁵³ Thus Jacob’s mourning for Joseph (Gen 37:34,35) and David’s for his son (2 Sam 12:15-24) indicate a ritual descent into the underworld, as portrayed in KTU 1.161:21ff. However, this is unlikely, even though Jacob seemed to have been engaged in full mourning rituals as he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ‘mourned’ for his son.²⁵⁴ Lewis’s argument is based on the interpretation of יָרַד in the KTU text where, although the ritual is obvious, the ‘subject and nature of the descent to *arṣ* is unclear.’²⁵⁵ In its biblical usage יָרַד in relation to death usually means ‘a descent to the place of death’, which is variously described as pit, sheol, grave, silence, dust, death, people of old, etc. This is a place of no return, but only Yahweh could raise them up.²⁵⁶ Thus the ritual mourning of Jacob indicates only his overwhelming grief over his beloved son Joseph. A similar sentiment is also expressed later at the thought of Benjamin’s death (42:38; 44:29,31). In both these instances it probably means that Jacob ‘will remain mourning until his death.’²⁵⁷ It is equally unlikely in David’s case to mean a ritual descent into the underworld. Indeed, his words, ‘Can I

²⁴⁹ Bray (1993: 72).

²⁵⁰ Skinner (1930: 335); Speiser (1964: 173); von Rad (1965: 249); McEvenue (1971: 22); Wenham (1994: 124-25).

²⁵¹ Westermann (1985: 373).

²⁵² Josh 7:6; 1 Sam 4:12; 2 Sam 12:20; 15:30; 19:5; Isa 22:12; Jer 16:6; 41:5; Ezek 7:18; 24:15-24; Amos 8:10; Job 1:20; 2:12; Neh 9:1; cf. de Vaux (1961: 59); Spronk (1986: 244); Wenham (1994: 126).

²⁵³ Lewis (1989: 43-46).

²⁵⁴ As in Gen 23:2 both סָפַד and בָּכָה are used here.

²⁵⁵ Johnston (1993: 158).

²⁵⁶ Num 16:30,33; 33:24; Isa 38:18; Ezek 26:20; 31:14; Pss 22:29; 28:1; 55:23; 115:17; Job 7:9; etc. Cf. *TDOT* (6: 319ff.); Westermann (1986: 44).

²⁵⁷ Westermann (1986: 44); cf. Wenham (1994: 357).

bring him back again?', and his pleading with God indicate the reverse.²⁵⁸ Therefore there is no suggestion of a ritual descent here.

Thirdly, it is doubtful that there is no hope of afterlife in the texts. As we noted above the desire for a proper burial, the desire to be buried in the family grave and the stereotyped phrase 'gathered to his people' suggest some belief in the afterlife. Moreover, this formula is used only for the patriarchs and for Moses and Aaron. It could not have meant burial in the family grave since this is mentioned after the record of death and before burial in the case of the patriarchs, except that for Jacob 'died' and for Ishmael 'buried' is omitted; and in any case it cannot be applied to Moses and Aaron as they were not buried in their family grave.²⁵⁹

If ritual mourning does not necessarily imply a cult of the dead, does family burial imply it? Bloch-Smith argues that the biblical pattern of family burial suggests the belief that the dead ancestors possessed certain powers since they maintained intimate contact with God they had during their lifetime, and 'it is important for the suppliant to know the location of the burial in order to petition the deceased.'²⁶⁰ However, it is recorded that only six people (Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Leah) were buried in the cave of Machpelah (Gen 49:31; 50:13 cf., 25:9,10; 35:29), and the cave was certainly important as a burial place for the family line of Abraham, but it is not certain whether an ancestral cult was practised at Machpelah. First, the burials of Rebekah and Leah are not described, but simply reported later. If this place was so important for ancestral cult, their burial would surely have been recorded along with its mourning customs. Even Isaac's burial in the first instance is recorded without a mention of the cave of Machpelah. This is simply assumed. By contrast, burial was not recorded for several major OT figures such as Ishmael, Aaron, Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, and Deborah, Eli, Jeroboam, Ahab, Jeroboam II, Hezekiah in Kings and Jehoakim. On the other hand, burial of some minor figures (Rebekah's nurse, Asahel, Ahithophel) is recorded, but not that of many others. 'Thus burial was not so important that it was necessarily recorded whenever a death was narrated or, in pre-literary tradition, that it formed a necessary part of any tradition.'²⁶¹ Secondly, important people in the clan, such as Ishmael and Rachel, were not buried at Machpelah (Gen 25:17; 35:19). Conversely, Joseph's bones were buried at Shechem where none of the patriarchal family members seem to have been buried (Jos 24:32).²⁶² Thus mourning practices are apparently more important than burial places in the patriarchal texts. Thirdly, there is no implication of any sort, either in the patriarchal stories or elsewhere, that the famous dead ever maintained intimate contact with God, and that people petitioned at their graves. The most suitable

²⁵⁸ Cf. Emerton (1991: 384); Johnston (1993: 159).

²⁵⁹ Johnston (1993: 90).

²⁶⁰ Bloch-Smith (1992a: 111); cf. Kennedy (1992: 106-108).

²⁶¹ Johnston (1993: 85).

²⁶² Bloch-Smith (1992a: 114-15) wrongly assumes that Joseph was interred in the family grave. She probably means at Shechem, but there is no record of a family grave prior to Joseph's interment there.

candidate to have maintained intimate contact with Yahweh after his death would have been Moses, but his burial and grave are surrounded with mystery (Deut 34:5-6), and there is no record of any petition to him by anyone later in history. Human mediators have their part (Jer 15:1), but not after their death. 'The only recorded consultation of a famous person (Samuel) occurred far from his burial place.'²⁶³ And even here Samuel was not the ancestor (אָב) of Saul, and the texts do not condone the actions of the latter.²⁶⁴ Therefore, while proper burial and family burial were desirable during patriarchal times and later, and mourning rituals were part of the burial practices in general, there is no indication of a practice of the ancestral cult in the patriarchal narratives. Thus Albertz sums up: 'while the significance attached to the tombs of paternal and maternal ancestors in the patriarchal narratives and formulas like 'be gathered to his fathers' ... still indicate that there was emotional solidarity between the living members of the family and their dead ancestors, there are no references whatsoever in the patriarchal narratives to a regular cult of the dead of the kind evident, for example, in the *kispu* ritual of Mesopotamia, and elsewhere they are scanty'²⁶⁵

However, several scholars feel that a cult of the dead can be seen in certain other practices in patriarchal stories, such as the Bethel episode where Jacob vows tithes to God, and the Jacob-Laban treaty and the communal meal that followed. We shall examine these text in turn.

Gen 28:22; Gen 31:44-54. Following Halevi, Bloch-Smith translates אֱלֹהִים, אֱלֹהִים, and אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתָם in these texts as 'divine beings' (referring to the deified ancestors), 'shrine to the deified ancestors' and 'their ancestral deities' respectively. She argues that: אֱלֹהִים is 'unequivocally used for the dead Samuel' in 1 Sam 28; Isaiah 8:19 provides another example of this use; the tithe offered in Gen 28:22 was the same tithe prohibited to the dead in Deut 26:14; and the anointing of, and pouring drink offerings to, the מִצְבָּה and the sacrifices on the hill-tops in Gen 31:52-54 are all part of the cult of the dead.²⁶⁶ Most scholars, however, take אֱלֹהִים in 1 Sam 28:13 as 'supernatural being or spirit'²⁶⁷ following Akkadian, Ugaritic, Hittite, Egyptian and Phoenician parallels, although it could also mean 'deceased children and ancestors' in Akkadian, 'dead and deceased kings' at Ugarit, and 'dead and deified kings' in Hittite and Egyptian sources.²⁶⁸ אֱלֹהִים in Isa 8:19 may mean 'spirits of the dead' or simply 'spirits'.²⁶⁹ It is possible,

²⁶³ Johnston (1993: 87).

²⁶⁴ Cf. Johnston (1993: 129).

²⁶⁵ Albertz (1994a: 38); cf. Bailey (1979: 35f.).

²⁶⁶ Bloch-Smith (1992a: 123ff., 127ff.; 1992b: 220-22).

²⁶⁷ Elsewhere it could mean 'household gods', 'judges' or 'rulers', 'supernatural beings' and occasionally 'specific man'. Gen 31:30,32 cf. vv. 19,34,35; Ex 21:6; 22:7f.; Pss 8:6; 82:1,6; Gordon (1935: 140); Heidel (1949: 196-97); Baldwin (1988: 159); Johnston (1993: 110).

²⁶⁸ Cf. variously *RLA* (3: 543); Bayliss (1973: 117 n.19); Kitchen (1977: 132); Spronk (1986: 147 n.4); Knoppers (1992: 114f.); Hornung (1983: 156); Johnston (1993: 110-15).

²⁶⁹ See discussion in Johnston (1993: 10-15).

though not unequivocal, that אלהים in these two occasions refers to the dead. But it is unlikely that it has the same meaning in Gen 28 and 31. The context in the former case clearly demands some meaning such as 'spirits' or 'gods', but there is no justification to read the same meaning in the latter, since Jacob was nowhere near the graves of his ancestors, and the place where he lay had no significance for the story prior to his lodging. Further, Jacob was taken totally by surprise in the story as he was not expecting an encounter with God, let alone with an ancestor. By the same reasoning it would be impossible to establish that Jacob and Laban were involved in a cult of the dead in Gen 31:44-54. Bloch-Smith sees the stone 'pillar', מצבה, probably also the 'cairn', גל, the sacrifices on the hill, בהר זבח, and the phrase אלהי אביהם ('their ancestral deities' according to her) in their oath, as evidence for a cult of the dead. However, the language in the context and the names given to the pillar and cairn suggest a treaty among the non-literary cultures. Thus a majority of scholars see the transaction between them as a 'non-aggression pact' and the communal meal as the sealing and 'conclusion of the dispute'.²⁷⁰ The sacrifices by Jacob in v. 54 also must be seen as part of the covenant.²⁷¹ Therefore there is no suggestion here of an ancestral cult as assumed by Bloch-Smith. Similarly, Bloch-Smith's assumption that the tithe vowed in Gen 28:22 is the same tithe prohibited as an offering to the dead in Deut 26:14b is impossible to maintain. The latter text says that an Israelite presenting his tithe must declare that he has 'not eaten it in mourning, or carried it while unclean or given to the dead.' Some scholars interpreted the meaning of the last phrase 'to the dead', למת, as that which is given for the refreshment of the mourners or the grave food for the dead spirits.²⁷² This is possible in view of the Deuteronomic concern for the poor and the needy, but it is not convincing. On the other hand, the text implies that only tithed food, not food in general, was denied to the dead. Since the tithe was an offering to God, presenting it to the dead probably implied their veneration, hence the Deuteronomic editors prohibited the practice, but they probably allowed the 'grave food'²⁷³ for the normal care of the dead,²⁷⁴ which was thought to be harmless in later Jewish traditions.²⁷⁵ It is possible that the patriarchs were involved in such activities, but the texts themselves are silent about it. On the other hand, the story of Jacob at Bethel has no hint of any mourning or even any memorial of an ancestor. Jacob's tithe is clearly related to the vow, which he made not to an ancestor but to Yahweh whom he has just met. Therefore Bloch-Smith's assumption has no basis in the text.

²⁷⁰ Buis (1966: 399); Westermann (1985: 498-500).

²⁷¹ Wenham (1994: 281-82).

²⁷² Reider (1937: 241); de Vaux (1961: 60).

²⁷³ To call it 'grave offerings', as it is often done, is 'potentially misleading' because of term's sacrificial connotation. Johnston (1993: 136 n.16).

²⁷⁴ Von Rad (1966: 160); Spronk (1986: 248); Johnston (1993: 136-37). *Contra* Driver (1895: 292); Lewis (1989: 103).

²⁷⁵ Tobith 4:17; Ecclus 30:18 (this text could even be a ridicule of the practice, so Driver); 2 Macc 12:45.

Other proposed reference to the cult of the dead: Several scholars claim that burial markers such as Rachel's grave-stone in Gen 35:19-20 (cf. Absalom's memorial stone, 2 Sam 18:18), and the oak at Bethel where Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, was buried served as loci for death cult activities in Israel.²⁷⁶ Apparently Rachel's grave remained significant in the preserved tradition (Gen 48:7; 1 Sam 10:2; Jer 31:15-17; Mt. 2:17-18), but the view that Rachel's tomb became a place of pilgrimage for generations is based on a dubious interpretation of the word *בצלצח* as 'in the shade of a shiny rock' in 1 Sam 10:2. Luker argues that the tombstone became smooth and shiny because of the continual anointing of it by pilgrims.²⁷⁷ However, none of the traditions suggests cultic activity at Rachel's tomb. On the contrary, the last two texts cited indicate a prophetic imagination that Rachel was weeping for her children, the exiled Israelites, because her tomb was situated on the border of Benjamin and Ephraim. There is no suggestion of grave activities or of someone pleading at the ancestress's grave to help the exiles return. Therefore Rachel's grave stone is to be regarded as a memorial stone, like Absalom's monument.²⁷⁸ Johnston comments: '[the cult of the dead] involved nourishing and feasting with the departed, and a pillar could hardly do this. If this cult was prevalent, Absalom would probably have adopted a son or commissioned a priest to conduct it (cf. Egyptian practice). If anything, erecting a monument suggests the unnecessary of an ancestral cult.'²⁷⁹ Similarly, it is unlikely that the grave of an insignificant character like Deborah, unknown elsewhere in the OT, should become a place of the cult of the dead. Oak trees are sometimes associated with theophanies and cultic activities (Gen 12:6; 13:4,18; 18:1) of the patriarchs, but there is no such suggestion here. And there is not even a memorial except for the once-for-all activity of mourning, which gave rise to the name 'oak of weeping'.

2.5. Conclusion

A distinct pattern of patriarchal worship emerges from the above investigation into altars and sacrifices within the patriarchal narratives. Unlike in the ANE and Israel, where worship was highly organised with an established cult and cultic personnel and with the occasion, purpose and procedures of sacrifices elaborately prescribed, the patriarchal cultic practices were informal with no fixed cult place or cult personnel and with no prescribed sacrifices or procedures. The places of their altars were usually outside the settled communities and probably distinct from their public shrines. At Shechem and Beer-sheba

²⁷⁶ Albright (1957b: 251,257); Lewis (1989: 119); Bloch-Smith (1992a: 113-14); cf. Eliade (1958: 217-19).

²⁷⁷ Luker (1992: 609).

²⁷⁸ Graesser (1972: 40).

²⁷⁹ Johnston (1993: 159).

there was no evidence of a Canaanite shrine during the patriarchal period. At Bethel, it is uncertain whether the wandering patriarchs used the Canaanite shrine. The occasions for their sacrifices were usually a theophany and moving to a new place or covenant and guidance. Unlike in the ANE and Israel, they had no festival or sacrifices for healing. Battles are recounted in the text, but there is no hint of the patriarchs offering sacrifices or invoking God for help on these occasions. The nature of their sacrifice is less certain. It was probably mainly part of their worship, but also served to fulfil vows or for thanksgiving. But there is no evidence of a cult of the dead nor a hint of caring of the dead

Thus, patriarchal altars and sacrifices are depicted, not so much as offerings in fulfilment of a requirement as was the case in both ANE and Israelite cult, but as a spontaneous act of worship in response to God's dealings with them. Thus they appear not only to be living as aliens in the land but also as aliens to the native cult. Their social and political relations with the indigenous inhabitants were harmonious, but only on the basis that they were still aliens. This means that their ethnic difference made them distinct as much as their religious practices. This probably had a large effect on their religious observances. The problem of religious syncretism became an issue only after Israel claimed the land as her own and wanted to become like the native inhabitants, but this does not seem to have been a problem for the patriarchs. Thus their religion was probably less syncretistic than that of Israel at other periods. As mentioned in the introduction, we shall now consider the 'prayer life' of the patriarchs which follows naturally from the altars and sacrifices, and we shall see whether their prayer was distinct from both ANE and Israel.

Chapter 3

Prayer

3.1. Introduction

That prayer and the patriarchal altars went together is evident from the frequent phrase, 'called upon the name of Yahweh', that accompanied the patriarchal actions of either building altars or planting a tree. Though the idea of prayer is implicit in sacrifice, the former may still exist on its own as one of the most effective forms of drawing God's attention to human needs. It is the motivation, form and results of prayer that reveal not only the religious ethos of the patriarchs, but also their theology of prayer.¹ It is the task of this chapter to explore the form and theology of patriarchal prayer as portrayed in Genesis. The fundamental occasion for any prayer is a situation of dire need in which a person cannot cope without help.² The most common such situations are childlessness, natural calamities, disease and other evil forces, danger from enemies and threat of war, and there are a host of other real or imagined dangers. It will be argued that as with the patriarchal altars, the situation and theology of patriarchal prayer is compatible with patriarchal lifestyle portrayed in Genesis.

At least five different forms of prayer may be identified: (i) prayer of petition, (ii) thanksgiving and praise, (iii) intercession, (iv) penitence and confession, and (v) curses and blessing. Not all these forms are prominent in every culture, but in one way or another most of these elements are reflected in prayer. Since prayer may fall into one or other of these forms, we shall focus on each of them separately and see how in the ANE and Israel particular forms were used and what religious ideas and theology of prayer were reflected by them. Finally, we shall focus on the patriarchal forms of prayer, and then compare them with the ANE and Israel in order to see whether they are distinct or similar and in what ways they reflect the patriarchal religious ethos. However, before we look into the forms of prayer in different cultures it will be helpful to explain certain general characteristics of these different forms.

Petitionary prayer: This is the most common form of prayer, and usually assumes a situation of distress or trouble. Sometimes it takes the form of a lament, as often in the psalms. The basic form of this prayer consists of three elements, namely address to the deity, petition for help and motivation clauses.³ Sometimes other elements such as a

¹ Cf. Greenberg's (1983) view that biblical prose prayer is a window to Israel's popular religion, and Miller's (1994) view that the form of prayer reveals its theology.

² Cf. Buck (1975: 61).

³ Cf. Heiler (1958: 15-40).

complaint, a statement of confidence and trust or a vow of praise are also present, mostly in psalmic prayers. The aim of the address is to make contact with the deity by identifying the deity by name or titles or by describing the relationship of the petitioner to the deity, thereby establishing a basis for seeking help. Sometimes the address may include praise and exaltation which is motivational, at other times self-deprecation, which facilitates the petition.⁴ The heart of the petitionary prayer, however, is the petition for help. While the address focuses on the deity, the petition focuses on the suppliant by describing in specific terms the suppliant's situation. Once this is secured, the petitioner makes specific requests usually in the words 'deliver/save/help' or 'forgive/heal'.⁵ The motivation clause gives reasons for the deity's intervention by using explicit and direct motivational expressions. These describe the deity's nature and character, such as his justice, faithfulness and goodness, or highlight the petitioner's affliction and helplessness or his faithfulness, loyalty and relationship to the deity.⁶ Such motivation may already be initiated in the address itself, but it is made secure by explicit and direct motivational expressions.

There is no suggestion in any prayer that following these steps will automatically secure the desired results, except in some magical rituals.⁷ At the same time, petitioners assume that the deity can be persuaded and moved to act in their favour. Even in Israel the 'impassability and immutability of God' were not part of the understanding of prayer.⁸

Thanksgiving prayer: This prayer presupposes an answered petition or a received favour, and indeed in most cases it is a natural and spontaneous response, but sometimes it can be organised and formal. Three features usually appear in this prayer: expressions of praise and thanksgiving, report of deliverance to others and vows of sacrifice.⁹ The last aspect sometimes may be spiritualised as 'vow of praise', at others it takes the form of votive altars and inscriptions.¹⁰

Confessional or penitential prayer: This often forms part of petitionary prayer. Sometimes it is found independently but still follows the pattern of petitionary prayer, with confession, petition, motivation and renunciation of sin. These elements are more obvious in biblical prayer than in the ANE. The heart of this prayer contains the charged expressions, 'I am sorry', or 'I have sinned', which form the first crucial step towards pardon and reconciliation. The form of this prayer is probably adapted from the pattern of inter-human speech in social relations.¹¹

⁴ Greenberg (1983: 11); Aejmelaeus (1986: 54-59); Miller (1994: 65).

⁵ Miller (1994: 91-92).

⁶ Gerstenberger (1980: 40-42); Greenberg (1983: 8-18); Aejmelaeus (1986: 59-84); Miller (1994: 114-24).

⁷ Walton (1989: 148-51).

⁸ Miller (1994: 126).

⁹ Cf. Miller (1994: 184-98).

¹⁰ Hermisson (1965: 45); Miller (1994: 197-201).

¹¹ Greenberg (1983: 19-37); cf. Gerstenberger (1980: 17-63); Miller (1994: 244-45).

Intercessory prayer: Prayer becomes intercessory when an individual or community or even one deity addresses another for the needs of others.¹² The notion of personal god probably arose in Sumer for the purpose of mediation.¹³ Though biblical intercession is often made by leaders of family, tribe and community or by prophets, elders and kings, the principle that familiarity can influence remains the same. This is true regardless of Israel's belief in her special relationship with God. Often biblical intercessors drew God's attention to this relationship as a basis for his action.

Blessing and curse: A prayer of blessing is usually a prayer wish on the part of the one who blesses. This kind of prayer is often occasioned by separation before a journey, marriage, a new job, daily greeting or imminent death. On these occasions the one who blesses normally commits the fortunes of the one being blessed into the care of the deity. Prayers of cursing, on the other hand, are directed toward enemies, sorcerers and any other malevolent force that disrupt the peace of the individual.

While any form of prayer mentioned above may be found in either prose or poetry, the function of a prayer need not change with its genre. However, prayers set in poetry may not necessarily reflect the life setting of the petitioner. The best example of this is the biblical Psalms.¹⁴ This will help us delimit our own enquiry into prayer in Israel, where psalmic material forms the substantial part of prayer texts. Since there are sufficient texts of prose prayers in Israel to form a suitable background for prayer in the patriarchal narratives, where prayer is largely if not entirely in prose, we shall leave out of consideration the psalmic texts of Israelite prayer.¹⁵ Since this is not possible with the ANE material where very few prose prayers are preserved we shall examine the most significant examples of prayer, whether prose or poetic.

3.2. Prayer in the ANE

3.2.1. In Mesopotamia

Most of our information comes from the hymns and prayers preserved often in the records or inscriptions of kings and rulers, and from objects related to prayer found in temples.¹⁶ In most cases the latter type of evidence was also largely controlled by the rulers. So it is not always certain whether it deals with the popular religion, or with the

¹² Cf. Balentine (1984: 162).

¹³ Kramer (1955: 171 n.3).

¹⁴ Cf. Westermann (1989: 13-16).

¹⁵ For specialised works on the Psalms, see Gunkel - Begrich (1933); Westermann (1980; 1981); Anderson (1983); Aejmelaeus (1986); Broyles (1989).

¹⁶ Cf. Falkenstein - von Soden (1953).

official cult of which the king was often the patron. Nevertheless, it still reflects human piety from the earliest known records.

Petitionary prayer: The Sumerian 'letter prayers' as votive objects left in the cella of the deity are the best examples of petitionary prayers in Mesopotamia.¹⁷

Though the form of 'letter prayers' was originally modelled on a letter, it gradually developed into a more poetic form like the laments of the individual in the Bible.¹⁸ Most of the letter prayers contain two or three of the recognisable elements we mentioned above, namely the salutation or address with which they begin, the body or the petition, and the conclusion of the letter. The salutation invariably modifies the name of the god with longer or shorter laudatory epithets, which were chosen not as a matter of convention but to signify the qualities of the deity and often related to the requests that followed. For instance, the letter which prayed for health praised the therapeutic skills of the deity; and one which asked for legal redress emphasised the unchangeable character of the divine command, and one of those concerned with scribal problems praised Enki as the lord of wisdom.¹⁹ Whether the laudatory epithets are conventional or not, that they are inherently motivational is obvious from the various letter prayers.²⁰ The body of the letter containing the petition is more elaborate and consists of complaints of social, economic and family adversities,²¹ and protests, petitions and formal reinforcements of the appeal, and even confession of sins. These elements may be seen clearly from a Sumerian letter-prayer addressed to the personal god Enki by a scribe named Sin-šamuh:²²

Address with typical laudatory epithets:

To Enki, the outstanding lord of heaven and earth whose nature is unequalled ...
The omniscient one who is given intelligence from sunrise to sunset,
The lord of knowledge, the king of the sweet waters, the god who begot me ...

Petition prefaced with complaints and protestations:

I have not been negligent toward the name by which you are called, like a father ...
I did not plunder your offerings at the festivals to which I go regularly²³ ...
I am (still) young,²⁴ must I walk about thus before my time? Must I roll around in the dust? ...

Damgalnunna, your beloved wife,
May she bring it to you like my mother, may she introduce my lament before you²⁵

¹⁷ 'Letter prayers', which originated during the periods of Agade, Ur III and Isin I, were organised into the scholarly curriculum in the Old Babylonian period. Hallo (1968: 73).

¹⁸ For a detailed analysis of the genre, see Hallo (1968: 77-80); Jacobsen (1976: 153-54); Miller (1994: 10-21). For a discussion of lament prayers organised in terms of Sumerian and Akkadian categories, see Dalglish (1962: 18-55).

¹⁹ Hallo (1968: 77); with respect to hymnic prayers, cf. Dalglish (1962: 44).

²⁰ Hallo (1968: 75-76).

²¹ Van der Toorn (1985: 64); cf. Job 9:15; 19:7,15; Pss 22:6-8; 55; 69; Miller (1994: 16).

²² Hallo (1968: 85-87).

²³ It is implied that the piety and the loyalty of the suppliant are incompatible with the sufferings being experienced. Hallo (1968: 79). Claims to moral innocence or ignorance are ubiquitous in many of the letter-prayers, so also the petitioner's piety and loyalty, or social and political status; Miller (1994: 18).

²⁴ It is assumed in other prayers that gods would be lenient toward sins of youthful ignorance; van der Toorn (1985: 96).

²⁵ The idea of gods as intercessors will be discussed below.

Asalalimnunna, son of the abyss,²⁶

May be [sic] bring it to you like my father, may he introduce my lament before you ...

Vow of praise:

When you have turned my dark place into daylight,

I will surely dwell in your gate of Guilt-Absolved,²⁷ I will surely sing your praises! ...

(Then) I will surely appear to the people, all the nation will verily know!²⁸

In some prayers, the petitioner's personal distress is described graphically as one eating and drinking with tears and sighing, and walking through marshes and falling into mud, crushed with pain and covered with gloom, weary and trembling.²⁹ Similar complaints of anxiety, panic and embarrassment can be seen also in *Numburbi* and *Suhilla* prayers.³⁰

Thanksgiving prayer: There is very little evidence of thanksgiving by individuals for favours received from the deity. With few exceptions, Mesopotamian hymns are 'almost entirely general descriptive praise of the deity.'³¹ However, several names given to children express the idea of thanks and gratitude to the deity who heard their prayers. Names such as 'Assur is great', 'Sin heard my prayer' (cf. Ishmael), and 'My god has dealt compassionately with me' are clear examples of thanksgiving prayer. These are similar to the names apparently given by Leah and Rachel to their children (Gen 30).³²

Confessional prayer: Confession forms part of the petition, but its intention seems to be more motivational than moral rectitude.³³ The meaning of some lines is unclear, but the confessional aspect is clear:³⁴

My fate has come my way, I am lifted onto a place of destruction, I cannot find an omen.

A hostile deity has verily brought sin my way, I cannot find (?) its side.

On the day that my vigorous house was decreed by Heaven,³⁵

There is no keeping silent about my sin, I must answer for it ...

When I have verily brought (my) sin to you, cleanse (?) me from evil! ...

The first line suggests that the petitioner has felt that his personal deity, having withdrawn his protection, no longer guides his affairs. On the other hand, he was probably

²⁶ Most of the deities addressed in letter prayers are connected with the underworld or with healing, indicating the threat of death to the petitioner of sickness, enemy or other evil forces. Miller (1994: 13).

²⁷ In addition to vows of praise, the petitioner sometimes makes other attractive offers, such as to become a slave of the deity or a sweeper of the temple, or to bestow a new title based on the latest kindness: 'when I have been cured, I will rename my goddess the one who heals(?) the cripples.' Hallo (1968: 79).

²⁸ Sometimes the petitioner calls upon others, such as the land, the nation, heaven and earth and even other gods, to join in praise of the greatness and the wonderful deeds of the deity who delivers. Mayer (1976: 327-34); cf. Pss 40:9-10; 52:9; 66:16; 116:14,18; 118:17, etc.

²⁹ Widengren (1937: 104,121); Dalglisch (1962: 25); cf. Pss 42:3; 28:1; 30:3; 69:15; 102:29.

³⁰ Mayer (1976: 72-75).

³¹ Miller (1994: 26); cf. Gunkel - Begrich (1933: 285-86).

³² Miller (1994:9); cf. *RLA* (3:162-63); Albertz (1978: 49-76; 101-19); Fowler (1988). Cf. the matriarchal prayers in 3.4.3 below.

³³ Walton (189: 152).

³⁴ Hallo (1968: 76). The quote is from the same Sin-Samuh's prayer.

³⁵ It is not clear if this refers to a judgement on the body of the petitioner.

misguided or troubled by evil demons.³⁶ The last two lines suggest that the petitioner's only way out from his problem was to confess his sin and be cleansed. Such an attitude is also clear from other Sumerian poems from about 2000 BC in which it was believed that man's misfortunes were the result of his sins and the confession of the latter would result in deliverance from the former.³⁷

The Sumerian *Ershahunga* prayers similarly focus on confession of sin and guilt. The meaning of *ershahunga*, 'to appease the heart of the deity', suggests this.³⁸ Further, confession of sin is also found in public laments over the destruction of the many ancient cities (e.g. Ur, 2000 BC).³⁹ The significant place given to confession in Mesopotamian prayer is an indication that there is a gradual shift of focus from the sufferings to the underlying sins that caused them, and this shift marked an increasing move towards a closer relationship with the deity.⁴⁰

However, there are several other texts in which knowledge of sin and guilt is simply denied. This is most openly expressed in the 'Prayer to Every God'.⁴¹ At other times its seriousness is played down.⁴² Furthermore, gods were blamed for not revealing their purposes to man,⁴³ and even for human sinfulness.⁴⁴

Intercessory prayer: In Mesopotamia, this was often presented to one deity by another, often of a lower rank, on behalf of the petitioner. This worked in three ways. First, the individuals usually requested their personal deities to intervene on their behalf to one of the high gods not only to enjoy the latter's good will, but also to find help in times of need.⁴⁵ Secondly, it worked sometimes the other way round when petitioners appealed to one of the high gods to mediate and help restore their strained relation with the personal god who had withdrawn his protective hand.⁴⁶ Thirdly, there are certain specific 'intercession deities' who, by some magical means, provided immediate access to the great gods who in turn settled matters with the personal god. However, petitioners depended largely on their personal gods rather than on the great gods, who were called upon primarily to influence the former.

³⁶ Cf. van der Toorn (1985: 64-65); Jacobsen (1976: 153); Saul in 1 Sam 28:5,6.

³⁷ Kramer (1955: 180); cf. van der Toorn (1985: 97).

³⁸ Michalowski (1987: 44).

³⁹ Miller (1994: 24,25).

⁴⁰ Hallo (1968: 81-82); Miller (1994: 21); cf. Jacobsen (1976: 147-64).

⁴¹ *ANET* (391f.); Hallo (1968: 79).

⁴² Lambert (1974: 281,283); cf. Kramer (1955: 179).

⁴³ *ANET* (435).

⁴⁴ Lambert (1960: 89).

⁴⁵ Jacobsen (1976: 159-60); cf. Miller (1994: 22).

⁴⁶ Mayer (1976: 231,234).

3.2.2. In Egypt

Petitionary prayer: A petitionary prayer of a poor man who experiences injustice in the law court itself is attested from the late Nineteenth Dynasty (ca.1230 BC):

O Amon, give thy ear to one who is alone in the law court, who is poor ... The court cheats him (of) silver and gold for the scribes of the mat and clothing for the attendants. May it be found that Amon assumes his form as the vizier, in order to permit [the] poor man to get off. May it be found that the poor man is vindicated.⁴⁷

The Mesopotamian letter prayers have their parallels amongst the Egyptians in their letters to dead relatives seeking their help in different circumstances. We have an example of a demotic letter prayer, probably from the late sixth century B.C., to the necropolis deity Thoth by his servant Efou. The petitioner requests deliverance from his fellow worker who inflicts severe persecution on Efou by stealing everything he had and killing his servants. Further, Efou's words in his appeal to Thoth, 'I have no human master', suggests that there were no social structures existing either to redress the injustice or to protect him from his persecutor.⁴⁸ There is little difference in the form of prayer between the second millennium Mesopotamian and the first millennium Egyptian prayers.

Thanksgiving prayer: Thanksgiving and gratitude may be found in the votive stele of an artisan, Neb-Re, of Nineteenth Dynasty Egypt (13th century BC). It seems that Nakht-Amon the son of Neb-Re acted irreverently with regard to a cow belonging to the god Amon-Re and thus became ill. The prayer on the stele is a fine example of not only thanksgiving, but also adoration, praise and intercession:

when he was (under) the power of Amon because of his cow⁴⁹... He rescued the Outline Draftsman ... I shall make this stela in thy name, and I shall establish for thee *these* adorations in writing upon it, because thou hast rescued for me the Outline Draftsman Nakht-Amon.⁵⁰

Confessional prayer: The various claims to innocence found in the Book of the Dead, especially in ch. 125, have been viewed as suggesting that Egyptians had no sense of sin and its consequences, but this view has been refuted by Morenz. He argues that the fact that the editor of the chapter had given the claims to innocence the most appropriate title 'So that he may be separated from every sin (*hww*) which he hath done' suggests the opposite. The assurance in chapter 125 testifies to the Egyptians' deep anxiety to avoid sin.⁵¹ Further, the exhortation of the sage Amenemope, 'Say not: "I have no wrongdoing ..."',⁵² and confession of sins to god elsewhere by individuals suggest that there was both

⁴⁷ ANET (380).

⁴⁸ Hughes (1958: 5-6); Miller (1994: 367 n.27). Cf. Gen 32:11; Ex 17:14; Josh 7:9; Judg 16:28; 2 Chr 20:11; Neh 4:5.

⁴⁹ This is probably a temple cow designated for the particular deity, like the many sacred cows attached to Hindu temples in India. The nature of the offence, however, is unclear. Cf. ANET (380 n.7).

⁵⁰ ANET (380-81); cf. Assman (1975: 349 lines 10-13); Miller (1994: 14,27).

⁵¹ Morenz (1973: 132).

⁵² Morenz (1973: 132).

consciousness of sin and a moral accountability to god. This is also evident from the stele of Neb-Re quoted above and from other texts.⁵³

Intercessory prayer: In contrast to Mesopotamia, the Egyptian intercessors were not gods but the deified kings and other important office bearers represented by statues installed in the temple precincts. The petitions were tied to these statues, which bore them perpetually before the gods.⁵⁴ The statues in many temples often bear invitations to the petitioner saying, 'I am the messenger of this or that god, I will pass on your petition to those gods.'⁵⁵

However, intercessory prayer is also attested in the Late Ramasside Letters (1100-1070 BC), where a community, friends, relatives and family members prayed for a man Dhutmose, who was summoned on a dangerous mission by the king. The man asked for their prayers when he wrote home while he was on his journey.⁵⁶ On another occasion colleagues prayed for a recently appointed official: 'May Pre^c Harakhte grant you a long spell of life in the post of your father!'⁵⁷ Such prayers were carried out anywhere and were not part of the cult, but intercession for the king was part of the cult, and the royal duties themselves involved praying for the people in general and for the family's future rule in particular. King Ramses III, for instance, prayed for the peaceful succession of his son to his throne after him.⁵⁸

3.2.3. Amongst the Hittites

Petitionary prayer: Petitionary prayer amongst the Hittites has similar features to that of Mesopotamia and Egypt. The 'daily prayers of the king' recited on his behalf by the scribe/priest at the temple have the familiar form: the prayer opens with adoration and praise and goes on to petition for blessings on the royal family, the people and the land, especially for its fertility. Interestingly the congregation shouts in response, 'Let it be so!'⁵⁹ Besides this formal prayer, we have examples of individual petition in times of sickness and misery. Kantuzilis, a member of the royal family, petitions for healing from sickness which had become misery and oppression to him.⁶⁰

There are no clear examples of thanksgiving prayer among the Hittites.

Confessional prayer: One of the best examples of confession is found in the plague prayers of Mursilis, which are in fact intercessory prayers for the people dying of a

⁵³ Morenz (1973: 32); cf. Dalglish (1962: 15f.); Lichtheim (1976: 104-10).

⁵⁴ Sweeney (1985: 229 n.103; cf. 219).

⁵⁵ Morenz (1973: 102).

⁵⁶ Sweeney (1985: 213-14).

⁵⁷ Sweeney (1985: 217). This may appear as a good wish on the part of the colleagues, but Sweeney argues that the idea of intercession in Egypt may be found in a gratitude, blessing, wish or even in a greeting.

⁵⁸ Sweeney (1985: 217).

⁵⁹ ANET (396-97).

⁶⁰ ANET (401).

severe plague.⁶¹ The address declares that the king had worshipped all the gods. This is followed by a protestation of personal innocence and a general statement that man is sinful, though the king accepted no responsibility for the plague. Then the prayer asks for an oracle to establish the causes of the plague. Interestingly the king, like David, interprets the plague as a judgement because of the Hittites' breach of a treaty with Egypt under an earlier king.⁶² This is followed by a confession of the misdeeds of the fathers which were particularly thought to be the cause of the plague. Finally follows the reparation and appeal to the justice and reputation of the name of the gods. Almost every aspect of the prayer attempts to motivate the gods. The theology of sin and retribution are similar to Israel's understanding of them, but this is only the king's interpretation, and there is no divine decree as in Israel. Further, the basis for appeal is not an established relationship such as the covenant in Israel, but the ritual acts of confession and restitution which have an almost magical effect.

Intercessory prayer: Hittite intercessory prayers contain some of the best examples in the ANE for comparison with Israelite prayers. There are both human and divine intermediaries, but it is the humans, in common with the biblical examples, who take it upon themselves to intercede for others; other gods are addressed only to pass on the prayers and to influence the great gods to whom the petition was ultimately addressed. The Hittite queen and consort of Hattusilis took advantage of her sex,⁶³ and pleaded for the life of her husband who had fallen ill. Her prayer was primarily to the Sun-goddess Arinna, but she also invoked other gods to mediate on her behalf to the Sun-goddess. To many of them she promised gold and silver statues and ornaments as inducements.⁶⁴ The finest Hittite intercessory prayer was probably that of king Mursilis, which we have already seen above.

3.2.4. In Canaan

Though the fragmentary prayer texts at Ugarit are not very significant compared to Mesopotamian sources,⁶⁵ a number of Phoenician and Aramaean votive inscriptions add to the Ugaritic information on Canaanite prayer.

Petitionary prayer: The legend of Keret provides a good example of this prayer. There is no mention of prayer here, but it is obvious in the expression 'to lift one's hands up to heaven' and in the act of sacrifice associated with it. The ritual sacrifice which Keret was asked to make is probably the normal way of invoking God.⁶⁶ Further, the prayer may

⁶¹ *ANET* (395-96).

⁶² Cf. 2 Sam 21:1-14; Roberts (1988: 36).

⁶³ She says, 'Among men there is a saying: "To woman in travail the god yields her wish."

⁶⁴ *ANET* (394).

⁶⁵ Roberts (1988: 36); Miller (1994: 27-28).

⁶⁶ Cf. the patriarchal altars along with the invocation of the name of Yahweh, suggesting the normal way of worship.

be implicit in the dialogue between Keret and El in the night vision.⁶⁷ This is obvious in the context of Keret's bereavement of wife and children, and of his vow to Athirat.

We have another petitionary prayer from the ritual texts couched in the form of a vow, prescribed to be used when an enemy attacked the city. Once again prayer is not explicit, but is obvious from the elaborate description of the vow⁶⁸ followed by an assurance, probably by a priest: 'So Ba[al has hea]rd your prayer. He will drive the strong one from your ga[tes, the warrior from your walls.'⁶⁹ There are no formal features here because it was probably a ritual prayer in stock available for times of need.

Petitionary prayer is also attested in two votive inscriptions from the ninth and eighth centuries BC, erected in memorial of the answered prayers:

I am Zakir, king of Hamat and Lu'ath. A Humble man I am ... I lifted up my hand⁷⁰ to Be'elshamayn, and Be'elshamayn heard me ... [spoke] to me through seers and ... [said] ... Do not fear, for I made you king, and I shall stand by you and deliver you from all [these kings who] set up a siege against you.⁷¹

The petitioner describes himself as a 'humble ('*anh*) man', which probably served as a motivation for the god to act (cf. Ps 34:6). His god answered his prayer by an oracle of salvation.

Thanksgiving prayer: The prayer of gratitude seems to be a universal phenomenon, although not many have been found in Canaan. The idea of thanksgiving is implicit in the legend of Keret, where the goddess Anath attempts to take revenge on Keret because he failed to fulfil his vow. This suggests that gratitude was expected for received favours. Similarly the Zakir stele is an example of a thanksgiving prayer of which few have survived in non-biblical records.⁷² While the prayer is a petition, the stele probably represents the performance of a vow and thanksgiving.

Blessing: The Ugaritic root *brk* means 'to give the power of the gods (to a man)', or 'to commend someone to a deity for a blessing'.⁷³ In the legend of Keret, El blesses Keret at the request of Baal saying, 'The woman you take ... shall bear seven sons to you.'⁷⁴ In many Phoenician-Punic consecratory inscriptions the phrase 'A blessed B' occurs as a concluding formula, and it expresses the idea of 'granting happiness, vitality and success' in a similar way to that of biblical usage, for instance, 'May Melqart bless my successor with life', or 'may the gods bless my way'.⁷⁵ The formula also occurs as a

⁶⁷ *ANET* (143,144); cf. Miller (1988: 150,151); Ps 6:7,10;

⁶⁸ *KTU* 119: 26-35; cf. 2.2.4; 6.2.4.

⁶⁹ Miller (1988: 139-55; 1994: 28-29).

⁷⁰ Cf. Keret.

⁷¹ *ANET* (655); Miller (1994: 28).

⁷² Cf. Miller (1994: 28).

⁷³ Cf. similar meanings for the root in Akkadian, Phoenician, Aramaic and South Arabic. *TDOT* (1: 282-84).

⁷⁴ *ANET* (146).

⁷⁵ The identical biblical formula, however, occurs in the Aramaic texts of the tomb inscriptions and graffiti from Egypt. *TDOT* (1: 282).

social greeting as in Ruth, but the biblical formula 'blessed be so-and-so' does not occur in these inscriptions. It is always understood, as in the biblical blessing, that it is the deity who bestows these blessings even when he is not explicitly mentioned.

3.3. Prayer in Israel

As Clements notes, biblical prayer is 'portrayed in a great variety of forms, sometimes with extraordinary simplicity and at others with great complexity and formality'.⁷⁶ However, biblical material on prayer is too extensive to deal with in any detail here.⁷⁷ As we said earlier, we will focus mainly on prose prayers, of which there are no less than 140 in the Bible,⁷⁸ and will deal with the various forms of biblical prayer to understand its content and theology. But before we do so, it is appropriate to look briefly at the language of prayer.

The context and range of words that describe the act of prayer suggest that prayer in Israel was primarily dialogical and could be carried out in both formal cultic, or informal mundane circumstances, by any one at any time, and through verbal and non-verbal communication.

Very general terms such as אמר 'to say' or דבר 'to speak' are used to introduce most petitionary prayers in the Bible, suggesting that prayer is an address to someone in a conversation.⁷⁹ Thus what Abraham, Jacob and Eliezer 'said' (Gen 17:18; 24:12; 32:9) or what David 'spoke' (2 Sam 22:1) to God was their prayer.⁸⁰ However, not every dialogue between God and man is a prayer, but only that which has an explicit purpose with an intention to achieve it.⁸¹ There are, however, other more technical words used which suggest that biblical prayer has a more formal side to it. The most frequent among them are חפלה (77 times) and its verb פלל (84 times), which means 'to place a case or situation before God for consideration or assessment'.⁸² While the examples where this root appears indicate that it is used for both prayer and intercession,⁸³ the idea behind it assumes God as

⁷⁶ Clements (1986: 2).

⁷⁷ For an overview of previous scholarship and the form and theology of biblical prayer, see Balentine (1993); Miller (1994).

⁷⁸ Cf. Greenberg (1983: 59 n.3); contrast Miller (1994: 233).

⁷⁹ Such ordinary words are also used to introduce prayers of intercession, thanksgiving and blessing, Gen 17:18; 24:12,26-27; 32:9 cf. Num 14:13; 16:22; 22:34; Judg 6:39; 10:15; 21:3; 1 Sam 7:6; 2 Sam 15:31; 24:10,17; 1 Ki 3:6; 8:23; 18:36; 2 Ki 6:20; Amos 7:2,5; Ezra 9:6; 2 Chr 20:6; Miller (1994: 374 n.2). For a discussion on other general words, such as בקש, 'seek', שאל, 'ask', and דרש, 'inquire', which are not so frequently used for prayer, see Westermann (1960: 2-16); Buck (1975: 71); Balentine (1984: 167-68); Miller (1994: 34-37).

⁸⁰ Miller (1994: 32-33); cf. Heiler (1958: 9).

⁸¹ Balentine (1993: 31).

⁸² Blank (1948: 337-38); Speiser (1963a: 301-6); Ap-Thomas (1956: 230-38.).

⁸³ Gen 20:17; Num 11:2; 21:7; Deut 9:26-29; 1 Sam 7:5; 12:19; 1 Ki 8:30; 2 Ki 4:33; 19:15-19; 20:1-3; Pss 17:1-3; 80:4; Jer 29:7; 37:3; 42:2,4,20; Dan 9; Jonah 2:1; 4:2.

a righteous judge who assesses every case ‘graciously’ (תחנה/התחנן).⁸⁴ Among other technical words not so frequently used is עָתָר, ‘entreat’ or ‘intercede’ (22 times). While its particular focus is on God’s response to prayer, it is most frequently used in Moses’ prayer to avert the plagues (Ex 8:8-9,28-30; 9:28; 10:17-18), and it is also used in contexts of formal ritual acts of sacrifice (2 Sam 21:1-14; 24:25).⁸⁵ Besides these, there are certain general words which virtually became technical terms for prayer: קָרָא, used to call upon the name of the Lord in worship, or more specifically to cry to God in times of need; and צַעַק and זָעַק used interchangeably for the ‘outcry’ of the oppressed.⁸⁶ Therefore, prayer in Israel, besides being formal and informal, emphasises God’s character as a righteous judge who assesses every case and deals kindly with his creatures in trouble.

3.3.1. Forms of prayer

Petitionary prayer: As in the ANE, petitionary prayer in Israel has the basic features of address, petition and motivational clauses, plus expressions of confidence and vow of praise. One of the best examples of petitionary prayer is the prayer of Hannah which is preserved in the form of a vow (1 Sam 1:11):

Address:	O LORD of hosts,
Petition in the form of vow:	if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thy maidservant, and remember me, and not forget thy maidservant, but wilt give to thy maidservant a son,
Motivation clause:	then I will give him to [Yahweh] all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.

As can be observed, the address, in contrast to the ANE practice, is very brief. It identifies the deity by name and by the title צַבָּאוֹת,⁸⁷ but there are no laudatory epithets. The petition is focused, not just on the affliction, but on the petitioner’s self-deprecation which is evident in the thrice repeated description of the petitioner as ‘maidservant’. While this in itself can be a motivation, an even stronger motivational clause is added in the form of a vow. What Hannah asks is not for her own sake, but so that she might give it back to the deity totally and permanently. Thus it is the deity who stands to gain if the request is granted. What the petitioner gains as a by-product is the removal of the stigma of barrenness. There can be no greater motivation for the deity to act in favour of the request. By comparison, the requests of Abraham, Keret and Dan’el may be less attractive to the deity.

⁸⁴ The heaviest use of the latter word is apparent in the prayers of Solomon and Daniel (1 Ki 8-9; Dan 9); Miller (1994: 43).
⁸⁵ Balentine (1984: 163); Miller (1994: 41-42).
⁸⁶ E.g. Ebel, Gen 4:10; Sodom and Gomorrah, 18:21; 19:13; the Hebrews in Egypt, Ex 2:23; 3:7,9; the poor, widow and orphan, Ex 22:23,27; the Israelites during the time of Judges, Judg 3:9; 4:3; 6:6; 10:10,12,14; several times in Psalms; the sailors, Jon 1:14; and sometimes there is simply the exclamation: ‘Violence!’ Job 19:7; Hab 1:2; Boyce (1989); Miller (1994: 45).
⁸⁷ Probably refers to Yahweh’s ‘celestial and/or terrestrial hosts, the divine council, the luminaries of the sky, and the totality of creation’. Seow (1992: 304).

The prayers of Hezekiah are much more elaborate and resemble the prayers of the ANE. His prayer in the face of the enemy's attack (2 Ki 19:15-19) reflects one of the most common occasions in the ANE when people turn to their gods for help, although it lacks ritual accompaniment as at Ugarit. The address precisely identifies the deity's name, the country whose patron he is and the location, and then goes on to describe him with extravagant epithets⁸⁸ as the only God in the world, and the maker of everything. The petition describes both the immanence (anthropomorphic description) and transcendence (he is not the work of men) of God and the motivation demands that this is the opportune time for this God to show himself as sovereign over the world's greatest power. The religion of this prayer is clearly monotheistic as it does not acknowledge the existence of any other god.

Similarly, Hezekiah's personal prayer for his own healing also reveals his personal religion (2 Ki 20:3). This prayer has a very brief address, and the petition is adapted into the motivational clause in which the petitioner's loyalty to God, not any ritual, is put forward as the ground for his favourable action.

Thanksgiving prayer: Some scholars have thought that there was no independent concept of thanksgiving in Hebrew thinking,⁸⁹ probably because of the considerable overlap in the meaning of the two biblical words, תודה 'thanksgiving or confession of what God has done', and תהלה, 'praise'.⁹⁰ However, several other scholars have argued convincingly that, though these words are closely related, they refer to genres or types of prayers and are capable of being distinguished.⁹¹

A third word, ברכה, is also used for thanksgiving to God as well as in interpersonal relations. About two-thirds of its occurrences refer to gratitude for favours received.⁹² The form of the blessing is consistent and the gratitude is normally found in the expression 'Blessed be the LORD', followed by a description of God's kindly acts.⁹³ The structure of this blessing in the OT consists of a *qal* passive participle of ברך, followed by the subject, God, who is the recipient of praise, and finally the reasons for the blessing. The setting of most of these blessings is non-cultic, while the reasons for them are always the saving acts of God.⁹⁴ One of the best examples may be found in Jethro's spontaneous thanksgiving when he heard from Moses all about Israel's deliverance from Egypt (Ex 18:8-12):

⁸⁸ They are more of historical experience than flattery.

⁸⁹ Cf. Westermann (1965: 27n.13,87-90).

⁹⁰ Pss 34:1-6; 40:1-2 are the best examples of confession of what God has done and praise to God as thanksgiving.

⁹¹ Miller (1994: 402 n.2); cf. Crüsemann (1969).

⁹² Cf. Blank (1961: 87-89).

⁹³ At least eighteen narrative occurrences of this form may be identified in the Bible: Gen 14:20; 24:27; Ex 18:10; 1 Sam 25:32,39; 2 Sam 18:28; 1 Ki 1:48; 5:21; 8:15,56(=2 Chr 6:4); 10:9; Ruth 4:14; Ezra 7:27; 1 Chr 29:10; 2 Chr 2:11; 6:4; Dan 3:28; Zech 11:5. *THAT* (1: 374); cf. Balentine (1993: 204).

⁹⁴ Balentine (1993: 204-5).

Blessed be [Yahweh], who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh.

Sometimes the occasion is turned into a communal thanksgiving with sacrifices and offerings, e.g. the songs of Miriam (Ex 15), Deborah (Judg 5) and Hannah (1 Sam 1:28 - 2:11). However, this formula of thanksgiving seems to be very common as it is also expressed in very informal circumstances by women, men, kings and commoners alike (Ruth 4:14,15; 1 Sam 25:39; 2 Sam 18:28; 1 Ki 1:48). These examples suggest that the idea of thanksgiving for God's saving acts is so integral to both the communal and individual religious ethos of Israel that this formula is said to be found even in the mouths of pagan queen and kings who were favourably disposed towards the affairs of Israel (1 Ki 10:9; 5:7; Dan 3:28).

Confessional prayer: This prayer is characterised by the charged expression, 'I have sinned', חטאתי, or 'I/we have sinned against the LORD', often followed by an acknowledgement of God's justice. The fact that this form is found even with the Pharaoh of Egypt confirms Morenz's contention (above) that the Egyptians indeed had the sense of sin and a desire to avoid it. Pharaoh says to Moses (Ex 9:27-28 cf. 10:16,17):

confession:	This time I have sinned;
elaboration:	[Yahweh] is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. Entreat [Yahweh]; (petition)
motivating reason:	for there has been enough of this thunder and hail;
renunciation of sin:	I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer. ⁹⁵

A similar form is found in the confessions of Balaam (Num 22:34), the Israelites (Judg 10:10; 1 Sam 12:10) and Saul (1 Sam 26:21), and in David's classic confession (2 Sam 12:13; cf. 24:10; Ps 51:1-17). In all these confessions elaborate motivational clauses acknowledging the justice of God are added. This shows that a moral dimension is inherent in biblical prayers of confession in which the guilty not only acknowledged the responsibility for his sin but also accepted God's judgement as just.⁹⁶ Miller thinks that the confession in Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel (Ezra 9:5-10; Neh 1:4,7; Dan 9:3,11) characterised by 'extreme acts of contrition and humbling oneself, such as weeping and fasting, and tearing of garments' is peculiar to later Israel.⁹⁷ However, such attitude in prayer is by no means confined to the later period. It is evident in the prayers of Abraham (Gen 17:3; 18:2), Moses (Num 16:22; Deut 9:25), Samuel (1 Sam 7:6), David (2 Sam 12:16,21) and Hezekiah (2 Ki 19:1,2) as well.

Intercessory prayer: As has been already stated, the intercessors in Israel were often people of responsibility, such as leaders of family, tribe and community, or those prophets specially appointed by God to carry his message to his people. More than any

⁹⁵ Cf. Miller (1994: 252-53).

⁹⁶ Gerstenberger (1988: 213-14); cf. Miller (1994: 252).

⁹⁷ Miller (1994: 256-57).

others, it was Israel's prophets who were deeply engaged in intercessory prayers,⁹⁸ probably because of their very close acquaintance with God's plans and actions. Moses is especially described as repeatedly interceding for others.⁹⁹

Most intercessory prayers are in the form of dialogue with a very simple address. Their content reveals the character of God and of the intercessor, as well as God's relationship with the people for whom the intercession was made. First, the most significant presupposition behind every intercession was that God can be persuaded to change his mind and relent from judgement (e.g. Moses, Ex 32:12; Jonah, 4:2). This is further confirmed by God's own desire to seek intercessors/mediators, and his susceptibility to the pleas of 'his servants, the prophets' (Ezek 22:30-31; Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11,12).¹⁰⁰ Secondly, the character of intercessors, especially the prophets, as unselfish and sacrificial comes out clearly. Thirdly, the basis of all intercession is God's promised relation with the people and his revealed character of 'steadfast love' (Ex 32:13; Num 14:19).

Blessing and curse: The prayer of blessing, which is to be distinguished from the thanksgiving-blessing, appears to be one of the most common prayers in the Bible, and seems to take place in every day circumstances of family and community life in Israel.¹⁰¹ The most common informal occasions were when family members or friends separated from each other,¹⁰² when people got married,¹⁰³ in the context of meeting and greeting during a day's routine work,¹⁰⁴ or when people realised that they were about to die.¹⁰⁵ Blessing was also pronounced for those who showed loyalty to others.¹⁰⁶ The informal blessings were pronounced in serious as well as mundane situations, and when there was no cult involved. The form is usually jussive, 'May the Lord do so and so', suggesting that God is the source of all blessing, and the content is a prayer-wish for continuing welfare or a committing of the fortunes of the ones who had been blessed into God's hands.¹⁰⁷

The formal blessings, on the other hand, were pronounced in the cultic context of worship and thanksgiving by the priests and the Levites.¹⁰⁸ The clearest and most explicit

⁹⁸ Cf. Balentine's (1984: 169-73) reservations about this view and contrast Miller's affirmation (1994: 421 n.18).

⁹⁹ For example, to avert the Egyptian plagues (Ex 8:8-9,28-31; 9:28; 10:16-17) and God's wrath on Israel, Aaron and Miriam (Ex 32:11-13,30-32; Num 11:2; 12:13; 14:13-19; 16:22; 21:7; Deut 9:7,20,25-29). Probably for this reason Psalm 90 was ascribed to him as 'a prayer of Moses'. Cf. Freedman (1985: 56-59).

¹⁰⁰ Miller (1994: 277) pertinently notes that the changing or not changing of God's mind is especially related to his 'acts of punishment or judgement, not to acts in general'. For the theological questions raised by God's changing of his mind, see Greenberg (1977-78: 21-36).

¹⁰¹ *TDOT* (2: 304): The 'oldest and most persisting setting' for blessing in the OT is the family.

¹⁰² Gen 24:59-61; 31:55; Ruth 1:8-9; 1 Sam 20:13.

¹⁰³ Gen 24:60; 28:1-5; Ruth 4:11,12.

¹⁰⁴ Ruth 2:4,5

¹⁰⁵ Gen 27:1-4,27-29,39-40; 48:8-22; 49:1-29; Deut 33:1-29.

¹⁰⁶ Ruth 2:12; 3:10 cf. 4:14.

¹⁰⁷ Miller (1994: 282,291).

¹⁰⁸ Deut 10:8; 21:5 cf. Lev 9:22-23. Exceptions are David and Solomon, 2 Sam 6:18; 1 Ki 8:14,55; and the psamist, Pss 29:11; 67:1,7; 115:14,15. But the context in all these is probably cultic.

priestly blessing is the so-called 'Aaronic blessing' (Num 6:22-27).¹⁰⁹ It has also been found on two silver amulets of the seventh/sixth centuries BC, showing its significance in Israel.¹¹⁰ The form and content of this blessing are the same as in the informal blessing, except that the formal blessing is more comprehensive and lacks reference to a specific occasion. Like other blessings, its source is God and its nature a prayer-wish. Its function, however, is to sustain the hopes of God's people in the providence of God.¹¹¹

Curse prayers are the corollary of blessing in the Bible, but they do not occur in the patriarchal narratives, and hence they need not occupy our attention much. They are not as numerous as the blessings, but are nevertheless present especially in the Psalms.¹¹² While the form of these prayers is the same as the blessing, the content is just the opposite, in that they passionately seek the harm or destruction of enemies. As with the blessing, the divine source of the curse is not always mentioned, but is assumed and often made explicit, especially in the Psalms where the prayers are directly addressed to God (e.g. Ps 139:19-22). Miller rightly notes that the overriding concern of these prayers was to 'turn the issue of justice over to God rather than taking vengeance into one's own hands.'¹¹³

3.3.2. Comparative analysis

There is little variation in form, content and setting of prayer between Israel and the ANE. The address in Israel was simple and short, while in the ANE it was prefaced with long introductory sections of praise. The content in both was the same with similar problems of childlessness, sickness, sin, enemies, etc. The setting in Israel was both formal and informal, while it was largely formal and cultic in the ANE. However, there are significant differences in how they viewed prayer as to what they expected of it and how they achieved it. While the Mesopotamian incantations and ritual prayers were largely intended to manipulate, coerce and appease the angry god,¹¹⁴ the Sumerian letter prayers and some Hittite petitionary prayers often relied on seducing the deity with gifts and presents, expecting almost mechanical if not magical results. In contrast, the Israelite prayers are largely an appeal to God's promises to the patriarchs and his obligations to Israel.¹¹⁵ These were declared or recalled time and again by God through Israel's leaders

¹⁰⁹ For an extended treatment of the priestly blessing, see Miller (1975: 240-51); Freedman (1975: 35-48); Fishbane (1983: 115-21).

¹¹⁰ Yardeni (1991:176-85).

¹¹¹ Miller (1994: 298).

¹¹² Sometimes they are embedded in the blessing, Gen 9:25; 27:29; 37:22; the curses will come upon Israel also if they disobey God's commands, Deut 28; other texts where curses occur: 2 Sam 3:29,39; Jer 18:21-22; Mal 2:12; Pss 35:4-6,8,26; 58:7-8; 69:22-28; 109:6-19; 139:19-20; 140:9-11. For a comprehensive treatment of the subject, see Brichto (1963).

¹¹³ Miller (1994: 303).

¹¹⁴ Cf. Walton (1989: 157).

¹¹⁵ Cf. Walton (1989:157). However, there are occasions when prayer and ritual were closely associated in Israel (1 Sam 7:8-10; 2 Sam 24:25; Job 42:8), and at times the ritual was almost magical (Lev 14).

and prophets so that Israel knew what it was that pleased her God and what aroused his anger. Therefore national or personal calamity, disaster, defeat or disease was always traced back to a disobedience to, or violation of, a law prescribed by God. Thus Israel knew in such situations that God would be pleased not by ritual or sacrifice but confession of disobedience and renewal of the covenant obligations.¹¹⁶

Further, not all prayer in the ANE reveals the personal piety behind it. The Mesopotamian and Hittite healing rituals especially are fixed in regard to place, time, the offerings and incantations. The priest performs the ritual and the accompanying gestures with little variation, expecting magical results. However, the presence of theophoric personal names and the idea of a personal god in Mesopotamia and the concept of a patron deity for royal families elsewhere suggest that there exists an assumed or inherited relationship between the deity and the petitioner, although it is not clear what this implies for the individual or the deity. Sometimes the personal relationship is entirely dependent on the need of the petitioner, and could be strained even without the knowledge of the petitioner. The petitioner had to approach a higher god to mediate between him and his personal god who had abandoned him. There is no declared relationship between the petitioner and the deity in the ANE as can be found in Israel. In contrast, Israel approaches God almost as a right, on the basis of such a bond. This is even more evident in the case of Israel's intercessors who make the covenant relationship the basis for their intercession. Further, no intercession is made by a dead person or ancestor however great he might have been. Thus prayer, besides being a means of asking and receiving from God, is primarily a relationship, sometimes an intimate relationship, between God and the petitioner. Intercessory prayer adds a new dimension to this relationship, in that the intercessor was allowed to enter into the divine council in order to warn people to change their ways, or to persuade God to change his mind and relent from judgement. This kind of prayer is alien to the ANE.

3.4. Prayer in the patriarchal narratives

About twenty times in all prayer is either mentioned or alluded to in the patriarchal narratives. In six of these instances it is only the allusion to prayer that is recorded and not the prayer itself.¹¹⁷ However, in other texts all the types of prayers that are found in Israel occur, except the imprecatory prayers. Thus there are some general references to prayer, such as 'calling on the name of Yahweh', and to prayers of petition, thanksgiving, intercession and blessing. We have already touched upon some of these instances in our

Nevertheless, these exceptions only prove the rule that magical rituals have no place in the official cult of Israel.

¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, prayer in Israel often degenerated into mere ritual, to the extent of expecting magical results. But this was sharply criticised by the prophets (Isa 1:11-16; Amos 5:21-25).

¹¹⁷ Gen 20:7,17; 25:21; 30:6,22; 47:31 (see Targum Neofiti).

discussion of prayer in Israel. We shall look at them more closely in the context of the patriarchal narratives.

3.4.1. General reference to prayer

As we have noted above, קרא, 'to call', is one of the general terms used for prayer in Israel which virtually became a technical term. This term occurs four times with בשם יהוה in the patriarchal narratives, all in the context of either building an altar or planting a tree (Gen 12:8; 13:4; 21:33; 26:25), which were in themselves strong tokens of worship. Though this word occurs over 700 times in the Scriptures, it occurs only about 24 times with בשם יהוה,¹¹⁸ and with יהוה or אל יהוה about another 70 times. But the latter cases usually refer to crying to God for help in different situations, and hence their relevance for our purpose is not very great.¹¹⁹ However, its occurrence with בשם יהוה in the Bible probably throws light on our understanding of its relation to prayer or worship in the patriarchal narratives. Of the twenty occurrences outside the patriarchal narratives, it refers eleven times to worship in general.¹²⁰ In the others it refers to prayer for help in different situations.¹²¹ Interestingly, in two of these instances it is the prophets of Baal that pray for help using the similar expression, 'they called on the name of Baal'. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that קרא בשם יהוה is a common expression for both prayer in a specific situation and worship in general, and it is the context that determines the meaning in each situation. The context where this expression occurs in the patriarchal narratives gives no suggestion that the patriarchs are crying to God in some specific need. On the other hand, since it occurs in the context of building altars and planting a tree, it probably refers to their worship in general.¹²² Westermann sums it up well:

One can conclude ... that J wanted to describe worship in the patriarchal period by this two-part event. The expression קרא בשם יהוה stands for the *word* in worship while the building of the altar (or some other action, like the planting of a tamarisk) indicates the *action* in worship. The background of 12:8 ... is the awareness that the two basic elements of word and action are already part of worship in its simplest form. The designation of the word element gives notice that the indispensable presupposition for worship is the union of man with God which takes place with the invocation of the name of God.¹²³

It is not clear, however, what Westermann means by 'union of man with God' in the above quotation. But as we have observed above, the invocation of the name of the

¹¹⁸ Gen 4:26; 12:8; 13:4; 21:23; 26:25; Ex 34:5; 1 Ki 18:24,25,26; 2 Ki 5:11; Isa 12:4; 41:25; 64:6; Jer 10:25; Joel 3:5; Zeph 3:9; Zech 13:9; Pss 79:6; 80:19; 105:1; 116:4,12,17; 1 Chr 16:8; Balentine (1984: 165-66).

¹¹⁹ This conveys the cry of the poor when mistreated (Deut 15:9; 24:25); the cry of others in need, e.g. Samson (Judg 15:18; 16:28), Samuel (1 Sam 12:17,18), David (2 Sam 22:7) and Job (12:14); and the call to God for help in many Psalms. Miller (1994: 44).

¹²⁰ Gen 4:26; Isa 12:4; Jer 10:25; Zeph 3:9; Zech 13:9; Pss 79:6; 80:19; 105:1, etc.

¹²¹ Ex 34:5; 1 Ki 18:24,25,26; 2 Ki 5:11; Is 41:25; Joel 3:5; Ps 116:4. The meaning in Exodus and Isaiah is ambiguous.

¹²² Gunkel (1902: 48).

¹²³ Westermann (1985: 156).

deity in the address enables the worshipper to make contact with the deity. This may be just as true in prayers of petition, where the petitioner being in some dire need wants to assure himself that such a deity exists and that he is not pleading in vain, as in worship, since in the patriarchal narratives this expression of 'calling on the name of Yahweh' is found in relation to formal worship probably accompanied by sacrifice.¹²⁴ Such an occasion did not seek to make contact with the deity, but it assumed that such relation already existed and on the basis of this the worshipper simply paid his homage to the deity in a formal or customary way.

However, in Gen 21:33 two new elements are added to the expression קרא בשם יהוה, namely the planting of a tamarisk, אֶשֶׁל, and אֵל עולם (אל occurs with Yahweh only here in the patriarchal narratives.). It is not clear what is the relation of these actions with calling on the name of Yahweh. Neither the planting of a fir tree on either side of the temple gate in the Hittite healing ritual is relevant here.¹²⁵ Several scholars think that Abraham planted a sacred tamarisk at Beer-sheba and worshipped the pre-Israelite local *numen* called אֵל עולם, and that the cult was transferred to Yahweh with the arrival of Israel.¹²⁶ But Jacob asks pertinently, 'Can one plant a sacred tree?' He then goes on to suggest that it was 'meant to be a lasting landmark' of a pastoral nomad.¹²⁷ Others think that the planting of the tree is analogous to building altars on earlier occasions, since worship followed both types of actions.¹²⁸ Westermann implies this in the above quote. Hitherto, Abraham has been associated with oak-like trees, at which he either pitched his tent or built an altar for worship. As we have argued in 2.4., the author did not view the places or the tree as sacred prior to Abraham's activity. It is uncertain if he implied sanctity of the tamarisk here. The tamarisk plant in which a tree spirit is believed to live is frequently used in Babylonian healing rituals, but it is not planted or associated with worship.¹²⁹ Further, אֵל עולם need not refer to the local deity of Beer-sheba. The Hebrew, as Sarna argues, 'does not allow the use of a proper name in the construct state joined to a noun. Hence, *'el* in the phrase *'el 'olam* can no longer be the proper name of a god but means simply "God".'¹³⁰ Thus it may be a logical epithet of a deity called upon to witness the formal treaty between Abraham and Abimelech.¹³¹ In view of the latter's granting of rights to water, it is appropriate for Abraham to memorialise the event by planting a tree and worshipping God.¹³²

¹²⁴ Cf. Wenham (1987: 280-81).

¹²⁵ Cf. 2.2.3 above.

¹²⁶ Gunkel (1902: 207); Skinner (1930: 327); Jenni (1952: 197-248; 1953: 1-35); *THAT* (2: 236).

¹²⁷ Jacob (1934: 489f.).

¹²⁸ Sarna (1989: 149); Wenham (1994: 94).

¹²⁹ Cf. ch. 7 n.33.

¹³⁰ Sarna (1989: 150).

¹³¹ Dillmann (1897: 138); Pope (1955: 14f.); Speiser (1964: 159).

¹³² Cf. Wenham (1994: 94).

3.4.2. Prayer of petition

Prayers of petition in the patriarchal narratives may be categorised as individual and community laments and pleas for help. Pleas for help, unlike laments, do not mention personal distress or danger to life. Otherwise all prayers of petition could be referred to as prayers for help. While the prayers of Abraham, Hagar¹³³ and Jacob may be called individual laments in which personal discomfort or an immediate threat to life is the utmost concern, the 'outcry' that had risen to God from Sodom and Gomorrah may be categorised as a community lament in which the threat to the community is the utmost concern. We shall deal with them each in turn.

Abraham's lament: Abraham's first recorded prayer in Gen 15:2-8 may be called a lament in the form of a complaint. Though Abraham is said to have called upon the name of Yahweh on several occasions previously, it is only here that we find him talking to God almost like a man to his friend. The address is introduced by the simple words, וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם (twice), indicating the character of this prayer as an informal dialogue with no cultic setting assumed.¹³⁴ This is clear from the previous verse where Yahweh has initiated the dialogue. There are no laudatory epithets as in the ANE, except אֲדֹנָי.

Then follows the petition, in the form of a complaint:¹³⁵ 'I continue childless, you have given me no children, and my heir will be Eliezer of Damascus'. There is no suggestion here that this is a 'factitious narrative'.¹³⁶ Abraham's childlessness and the dialogue is similar to Keret's situation and dialogue with El at Ugarit.¹³⁷ Their complaints are similar; while Keret says, 'What need have I of silver and gold? Grant that I may beget children', Abraham says, 'What will you give me, for I continue childless?' Both are drawing attention to their problem. While Keret's question presupposes El's immediate promise of silver and gold, Abraham's question presupposes God's earlier promises of children (Gen 12:7; 13:16). Otherwise the second part of the complaint, 'you have given me no offspring,' makes little sense.¹³⁸ They are protests, not requests.¹³⁹

The third element, the motivation clause, sets reasons for God's intervention. Indeed, enough of a reason has already been made implicit in the complaint itself, where

¹³³ It is not certain if Hagar's words in Gen 21:16 can be counted as an address to God. The form of the words suggests that she was talking to herself, but the context suggests that she may have uttered a prayer to God; so Miller (1994: 235). In any case since this is not one of the prayers by the patriarchs we shall leave it out of consideration.

¹³⁴ Pace Westermann (1985:219); cf. note 80.

¹³⁵ Greenberg's analysis does not include laments as part of prose prayers because it is generally assumed that the lament is a special characteristic of psalm prayers. However, its presence in prose prayers is undeniable, and where it is present 'it is almost entirely in the form of *complaint* to or against God.' Miller (1994: 69,86).

¹³⁶ Cf. Westermann (1985: 215); Wenham (1987: 325-26).

¹³⁷ ANET (143,144).

¹³⁸ Cf. Westermann (1985: 219-20); Wenham (1987: 327-28).

¹³⁹ Miller (1994: 71). For other such questions, see Ex 14:12; 17:4; 32:11; Num 10:11; 16:22; Josh 7:7-9; Judg 6:13; 15:18; 21:3; 1 Ki 17:20; Jonah 4:2; and numerous examples from the Psalms and prophetic literature. Miller (1994: 70-78,100); Broyles (1989: 35-53,135ff.).

God has been squarely blamed for doing nothing either about Abraham's situation or the promises already made. Those reasons are further reinforced by the motivational clause, 'and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus, a slave born in my house.' Exegetical problems associated with these clauses are particularly difficult,¹⁴⁰ but it is plain that the plight of the one who had no son in the ancient world is serious.¹⁴¹ Whatever the relation of Eliezer to Abraham, he can never fulfil the function of a son. Even if Abraham were to adopt one of his own slaves, it would solve only the problem of inheritance, not of posterity. In other words Abraham's name will disappear. This is made clear also in Keret's story:

And Keret saw his portion; he saw that his portion was wealth, that his seat was abundant in power; but at his departure the family would disappear, and someone from his surroundings would inherit.¹⁴²

The motivation clause in the legend of Aqhat, however, focuses on pious acts of Dan'el as well as the character of El and his relationship to him. Here Baal is the intercessor for Dan'el.

He gives oblations to the gods to eat,
Oblations to drink to the holy ones.
Wilt thou not bless him, O Bull El, my father,
Beatify him, O Creator of Creatures?¹⁴³

The motivation is explicit in the description of the devout acts of the petitioner and implicit in the epithets of El as 'my father', and 'creator of creatures', and the epithets are appropriate to the petitions made. The problem of 'inheritance'¹⁴⁴ and the continuation of the family line are certainly considered paramount in Abraham's prayer. Therefore the form and content of the prayer of Abraham and the parallels from Ugarit suggest that such prayers reflect the real life situation of childless fathers in the ancient world and that the biblical editors have probably transmitted fairly accurately what they had received.

¹⁴⁰ For a discussion of the problems and the literature, see Westermann (1985: 220); Wenham (1987: 328).

¹⁴¹ The story of Aqhat makes it particularly clear what a son could do for his parents in their old age and death and for the family line to continue. He carried out his parents' funerary rites, which were believed to safeguard the soul's well-being in the after-life. Though no such belief is evident in the biblical stories, child-bearing as social prestige for women is sharply focused (Judg 13:2-3; 1 Sam 1:3-8; Isa 54:1), and children as the continuation of a family line, and in some societies as economic benefit, was widely known in the ancient world. The recurring theme of childlessness in the patriarchal narratives (Gen 11:30; 15:2; 25:21; 29:31b), which is often attributed to God (16:2; 20:18; 29:31a; 30:2,22), must be viewed as a social problem in patriarchal society. *ANET* (150).

¹⁴² Cassuto (1950: 19); cf. *ANET* (143).

¹⁴³ *ANET* (150).

¹⁴⁴ Cassuto (1950:19-20) points out that the same stem is used for inheritance both in Ugaritic (yr) and in biblical texts (ירש). Therefore it is not necessary to assume, as Westermann does (1985: 220), that ירש acquired significance during the sedentary period of Israel when a son as 'heir' became important, whereas for the patriarchs, the 'son continues the life of the father; this is what the genealogy expresses.' However, the Ugaritic texts show that 'son' means both 'heir' and 'continuation of family line'. Given the value of Abraham's possessions and of his general characterisation as a rich prince, inheritance is as much at stake as family line here. Further, it is doubtful if the idea that genealogy expresses family line comes from the patriarchal time.

Nevertheless, there is a difference in the theology of prayer between the patriarchal narratives and the Ugarit texts. In the former there are neither several gods nor intermediaries. In some sense Abraham's prayer is also unlike prayer among the later Israelites. Most petitioners in the Bible, including Moses, hark back to the relationship of themselves or God to their ancestors, but Abraham does not go beyond himself. Abraham has a unique relation with this God. Thus, as far as his situation is concerned, Abraham fits well with the second millennium ANE, and with regard to his faith in one God, though this is not explicit, he fits well with the religion of Israel. His relationship with God, however, is unique in the ANE as well as in Israel.

It may be appropriate to consider here a similar prayer of Abraham for Ishmael. The context is again posterity, but Abraham has made some progress in this direction by obtaining a son through Hagar. God, however, tells Abraham that he will give him a son through his own wife Sarah (Gen 17:16). Abraham almost protests at this idea, and asks God to approve Ishmael as his heir: 'And Abraham said to God, "O that Ishmael might live in your sight!"' (Gen 17: 18).

Once again a non-technical word, ויאמר, is employed to introduce Abraham's address to God, suggesting the dialogical nature of his prayer. This lacks both an address and motivational clause because it is part of a longer conversation, even though it is only here that Abraham interrupts a long divine speech.¹⁴⁵ All that we have here is petition for Ishmael, but it is still a prayer. However, it was not premeditated by Abraham, nor did it arise out of any distress as with most petitionary prayers. The petition presupposes God's knowledge of Ishmael, although there seems to have been no contact between God and Abraham (for thirteen years, Gen 16:15; 17:1) since Ishmael was born. Nevertheless, the relationship between God and Abraham continued. Once again there is no cult nor are intermediaries involved. Perhaps prayer was the only means of contact with God for the patriarch and theophany the only means of contact with the patriarch for God. Thus the relationship between God and the patriarch appears to be unique.

Jacob's lament: The most elaborate personal lament in the patriarchal narratives may be found in the prayer of Jacob (Gen 32:10-13). It has all the elements of a petitionary prayer and could serve as a paradigm for other such prayers in the Bible. Our aim is to focus on its form and theology in order to understand the religion of the patriarch.

address:	God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O [YHWH],
(description):	who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your kindred, and I will do you good,'
self-deprecation:	I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and all the faithfulness which thou hast shown to thy servant,
(detail):	for with nothing but my staff I crossed this Jordan; and now I have become two companies.
petition:	Deliver me ... from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau,

¹⁴⁵ In v 3 Abraham interrupts, not with words but, with an act of prostration which in itself is a prayer posture of extreme humbling of oneself and a great reverence toward God.

description
of distress:
motivation:

for I fear him, lest he come and slay us all, mothers with the children alike.
But thou didst say, 'I will do you good, and make your descendants
as the sands of the sea, which cannot be numbered.'

This prayer also is introduced by the non-technical word, וַיֹּאמֶר, suggesting its dialogical nature.¹⁴⁶ The address is significantly different from that of Abraham in 15:2, where Abraham did not need to make contact with God. God himself made contact with Abraham, who only had to seize the opportunity and make his case. Jacob, however, was driven by his distressing situation (32:7) and was desperate to make contact with God. This is made amply clear by his repeated call to God in his address, which is also expanded here to establish a common relationship with the deity. Hence the repetition of the name of God, far from being irrelevant expansions,¹⁴⁷ has to do with the proper 'protocol' in relation to the deity in most ANE and biblical prayers.¹⁴⁸ Indeed ANE prayers, in contrast to biblical prayers, are replete with such epithets in their address to the deity. The epithets in Jacob's prayer, 'God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac,' are not titles but are relational,¹⁴⁹ indicating indirectly how he is related to God as a child of God's favourites.¹⁵⁰ Further, he adds his own experience of that relation with Yahweh, who told him when he was still in Paddan-aram (31:3), 'Return... and I will do you good.' This is indirectly telling God that 'his present predicament is the result of obeying the divine command.'¹⁵¹ This is probably the strongest motivation for God to intervene. Yet Jacob has not quite finished with such motivating language. He adds self-deprecation to it.

In his self-deprecation, Jacob acknowledged God's care and fidelity which had increased his family from a single individual, owning nothing but a staff, to two companies. Then he openly declares that he is unworthy of all this. This removes any potential suspicion on God's part that Jacob was ungrateful for God's past kindness. The point is rather that not only would what God had promised come to nothing, but also what God had already done would be immediately nullified. On every count, it is God's reputation that is at stake, and this must be motive enough for God to act.¹⁵²

In the petition, though the ground is well prepared by the address and its elaboration, Jacob leaves nothing to chance. He identifies the problem and verbalises his petition so well in so few words,¹⁵³ 'Rescue me'. Repetition of the cause of the distress, 'my brother, ... Esau' 'is not a doublet, but an intensification' of the cause of trouble.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁶ Pace Westermann (1985: 508). Cf. Wenham (1994: 290-91).

¹⁴⁷ Westermann (1985: 508-9).

¹⁴⁸ Greenberg (1983: 11-12); cf. Dalglish (1962: 23); Hallo (1968: 77,79); Gerstenberger (1980: 97); Miller (1994: 14-15).

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Eliezer's address, 'O Yahweh, God of my master', Gen 24:12,42.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Greenberg (1983: 12); the Hittite prayers above.

¹⁵¹ Wenham (1994: 291).

¹⁵² Greenberg (1983: 14).

¹⁵³ Greenberg (1983: 14).

¹⁵⁴ Westermann (1985: 509).

Finally, in the motivation clause Jacob openly confesses his fears that Esau might come and annihilate him, and acknowledges his utter helplessness. Thus Jacob, as Greenberg notes, 'combines God's promise of making him prosper with the promise of numerous progeny ...(and) recapitulates items that have occurred all through the prayer. As the family God, as the author of a promise to deal well with Jacob which, trustworthy as he is, he has already honored, YHWH must be moved by the imminent peril to Jacob and his family - which is ultimately a threat to God's declared plan.'¹⁵⁵

Nevertheless, it may be pointed out here that Jacob's prayer lacks the important aspect of the confession of guilt despite the fact that Jacob knew that his present trouble was the result of his deceiving his brother twice. In many Mesopotamian and Hittite prayers the cause of the trouble is often traced back to an individual or a community's moral or cultic breaches of conduct, and confession and restitution plays an important role in appeasing the gods. Even in Israel, sickness and misery or defeat in battle were often linked to individual or community lapses, and confession and restitution often formed an important part of prayer. This is understandable in the light of the moral code Israel is said to have received at Sinai. Jacob had realised the cause of his trouble, but the story does not portray him as morally wrong. That Jacob's prayer lacks confession of guilt fits well with the lack of any moral code revealed to the patriarchs. Therefore patriarchal religion must antedate Israelite religion. Further, in contrast to Israel, there are no moral demands on the patriarchs. There are only promises and blessing. This suggests that the basis of God's dealings with the patriarchs was different from that of Israel.

Communal lament (?): We have only an allusion to communal lament in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:20-21), but the identity of those who lament is not clear. That this is a lament is clear from the two general words, צעק and זעק, 'outcry of the oppressed', for prayer in the OT employed in this passage.¹⁵⁶ The actual prayer behind these words are rarely recorded, but sometimes it is expressed in just an exclamation, 'violence, חמס!'¹⁵⁷ Though these words occur only in the divine speech in the story of Sodom, they nevertheless imply the cries of people subjected to violence, and the story of Sodom amply illustrates that. The form of the 'cry' gives no clue to an understanding of its setting, but there are several hints in the surrounding story, which throw light on the situation, such as the citizens' attitude to aliens and strangers and their right to host strangers (19:9,1), their aberrant sexual norms, their failure to protect the marginalised and, above all, the total failure of their legal system.¹⁵⁸ Consequently, the oppressed had no one to whom to turn. Yet unusually, as Boyce notes, it is not the oppressed who come to the

¹⁵⁵ Greenberg (1983: 14).

¹⁵⁶ For a detailed analysis of these words, see Boyce (1988).

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Miller (1994:45).

¹⁵⁸ For the prophetic commentary on the crime of Sodom and Gomorrah, see Isa 1:10-17,23; 3:9,13; Jer 23:14; Ezek 16:49. Boyce (1988: 51).

court with their complaint,¹⁵⁹ but it is their 'cry' which as 'negative evidence' comes to God (אֱלֹהִים plus עָלַי, Gen 18:20), 'the Judge of the earth' (18:25), and 'becomes great "before" him (*lipnê*, Gen 19:23; cf. 2 Kgs 19:28, Jonah 1:2, Lam 1:22).'¹⁶⁰

The outcome of the story suggests, however, that the crying ones were probably the family of Lot,¹⁶¹ and certainly Abraham ^{intercedes} for the sake of Lot. However, it is possible that the 'outcry' is used as a personification of the violence itself.¹⁶² This continued to accumulate in increasing proportions before God who had rescued the innocent and finally overthrew the cities. Thus this is hardly a communal lament.

Prayer for help: Here we shall consider the prayers in which there is no lament or distress.¹⁶³ The petition of Abraham's servant (Gen 24:12-14 cf. vv. 42-44) on his mission to secure a wife for his master's son may be designated as prayer for help. This incident reveals that not only the patriarchs but also their servants offer prayers to the God of the patriarchs in times of need. The servant's piety is repeatedly emphasised in the story.¹⁶⁴ This probably reflects the piety of the master who often offered sacrifices and prayer, since the form and theology of this prayer is compatible with the patriarchal prayers.

The form is identical with Jacob's prayer which we discussed above, with address, petition and motivation clause. The address is introduced with an ordinary non-technical word, וַיֹּאמֶר, suggesting the conversational nature of the servant's prayer. Like Jacob, the servant identified the deity by name as Yahweh and established his relationship with him as the 'God of my master Abraham'. Thus he made it clear that he was approaching him entirely on the basis of his relationship with Abraham and probably on the basis of God's earlier mercies shown to his master.¹⁶⁵

With no further epithets in the address, he made his petition which in its basic form had two parts: 'please grant me success or make it happen before my eyes today', and 'show steadfast love, חַסֵּד, to my master Abraham'. The first part highlights the servant's own concern, that is his success in this mission. This is important for him, first because of his most responsible position in his master's house, and secondly because of his oath to his master. The second part of his petition focuses on Abraham's situation. For Abraham to realise God's promises of descendants and land, Isaac must stay in the land, a requirement for a claim to land, and he must marry, though not necessarily from his own kinsfolk.¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁹ Contrast 2 Sam 14:1-24; 19:25-31; 1 Ki 20:35-43; 2 Ki 6:24-31; 8:1-6; cf. *ANET* (149,151,178); Boyce (1988: 28-45).

¹⁶⁰ Boyce (1988: 51); cf. Gen 4:10; Ex 2:23; 3:7-9.

¹⁶¹ NT describes Lot as 'righteous' who was 'distressed' and 'tormented' over the lawlessness of Sodom (2 Pet 2:7-8).

¹⁶² Cf. the 'blood of Abel' which itself cried from the ground; and the 'cry of injustice' in Isa 5:7.

¹⁶³ For other similar prayers, see Num 27:16-17; Judg 6:36-37,39; 13:8; 2 Sam 7:18-29. Miller (1994: 378 n.4).

¹⁶⁴ Cf. vv. 12-14,26-27,42-44,48. Wenham (1994: 149).

¹⁶⁵ Cf. 24:27,34-41.

¹⁶⁶ See 7.4.3.

Thus, whether the servant had realised it or not, God's promises are shown to be at stake in his petition.¹⁶⁷ The servant adds detail to his petition by suggesting how God should initiate the way of success by helping him identify the girl who will pass the particular test he was about to conduct. Accordingly, God complies with it.

The motivation clause, 'By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master',¹⁶⁸ once again places God's reputation under test - whether he would continue to be faithful to Abraham or whether he would abandon him. Further, this would also begin the process of success for the servant even before he had met with the kinsfolk of Abraham. He could then confidently proceed knowing that God had already shown the way forward. This prayer of the servant is informal, non-cultic and non-polytheistic and there are no intermediaries involved. Therefore it is compatible with both the lifestyle and the religion of the patriarchs portrayed in the narratives.

3.4.3. Prayer of thanksgiving

Abraham's servant's prayer: We have an example of thanksgiving prayer in the prayer of Abraham's servant (Gen 24:26,27, cf. v. 48). This is a spontaneous response to God's answer to his petition just discussed above. In form it is a blessing, but in content, it is thanksgiving for answered prayer.¹⁶⁹

Like his petition, the servant's thanksgiving is introduced by the ordinary, non-technical word **ויאמר**, suggesting the informal nature of this prayer. That this was not an ordinary conversation is indicated by his gestures¹⁷⁰ and attitude: 'the man bowed his head, **ויקד**, and worshipped, **וישתחו**, Yahweh.'¹⁷¹ The address first identifies God by name and the petitioner's relationship via his master, just as in his petition above. The form of the address conforms with the Israelite prayers of similar nature, with the consistent form, 'Blessed be Yahweh', followed by a description of God's favours, 'who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master.' We may recall that he had petitioned only for God's 'steadfast love', but he gives thanks also for God's 'faithfulness' which, as Miller observes, is the persistence of that 'grace and kindness, the maintenance of the promise and blessing God offered to Abraham at the beginning.'¹⁷² This description

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Miller (1994: 56).

¹⁶⁸ Miller's (1994: 130) view that this 'functions as a statement of confidence echoing the petition' is unconvincing, since it seems to reinforce the statement of the petition, 'show steadfast love to my master'.

¹⁶⁹ For a discussion of the nature and examples of such prayer, see 3.3.1 above.

¹⁷⁰ Other examples of 'bowing one's head in worship': Ex 4:31; 12:27; 34:8; Num 22:31; 1 Chr 29:20; 2 Chr 20:18; 29:30; Ps 35:13(?); Neh 8:6. The gestures assumed during prayer in the Bible are: a less common posture of sitting, 1 Sam 7:18; Gen 21:16; the most common posture is standing, 1 Sam 1:26; 1 Ki 8:22; 2 Chr 20:5,13; kneeling, 1 Ki 8:54; 2 Chr 6:13; Ezra 9:5; Dan 6:10. Cf. Miller (1994: 50-54).

¹⁷¹ These two words are used primarily either in worship to God or to pay homage to a man of rank or to a king, Gen 43:28; Ruth 2:10; 1 Sam 24:9; 28:14; 2 Sam 14:2,22; 1 Ki 1:16,31; 2 Ki 4:37; Est 3:2,5; Prov 14:19 etc. The second word **שחח** is also used for bowing before other gods, Isa 2:20; 44:15,17; 46:6; 2 Ki 5:18; Ex 20:5; 23:24; Num 25:2; Deut 8:19; Jos 23:7, etc.

¹⁷² Miller (1994: 182).

looks like the epithets in Mesopotamian name prayers in which the very names given to children express thanks and praise for the favours received from the deity, e.g. 'Sin has heard my prayer' or 'My God dealt compassionately with me.'¹⁷³ As the names in Mesopotamian name prayers can express aspects of the petitionary prayer, so here the title in the praise is a reflection of the servant's earlier petition. Thus the thanksgiving flows naturally out of the petition.

Then follows the body of the thanksgiving in two parts: the expressions of praise and thanksgiving, and the report of God's deliverance to others. The first is declared in the personal testimony of the servant, 'As for me, Yahweh has led me on the way to the house of my master's kin.' Meeting Rebekah at the well was only the initial sign for the servant, but meeting her household for marital negotiations was the main purpose. The second part deals with the report of God's deliverance to others, which takes place most naturally in this episode in the household of Rebekah (24:42-49). This in turn is supposed to evoke the praise of others to the God of deliverance.¹⁷⁴ Interestingly, when the servant relates how God led him to identify Rebekah at the well, Laban and Bethuel respond, 'the thing comes from Yahweh' (v 50), indicating their implicit acceptance of the servant's testimony to the hand of God in this whole mission.

Once again there is no cultic action, and no intermediaries were involved in the prayer of Abraham's servant. Further, the servant's petition as well as his thanksgiving occurred most naturally and spontaneously in the story, suggesting that prayer was basically a relationship with God who had bound himself to his people. Thus the prayers of patriarchs' servants (Hagar included) are also compatible with the patriarchal lifestyle.

Matriarchal prayers (29:31-30:24): Unfortunately the prayers themselves are not preserved, except in the form of thanksgiving or other expression that explained the names. Rachel's demand for children and her desire to end her life amply illustrate the acute social problem of barrenness, as already noted with Hannah. The desperate struggle to conceive children and the rivalry between the sisters to outdo each other even by magical means suggests the traditions' compatibility with the religious and social ethos of the patriarchs. Further, Jacob's marriage to two sisters concurrently, contrary to the Levitical law (Lev 18:18), and the lack of any hint that the children would be the eponymous leaders of the future tribes suggest the tradition's antiquity and the author's concern to transmit rather than to rewrite it.¹⁷⁵ Jacob's love for Rachel is set in tension with Leah's fertility right through the narrative. There is a clear evidence of the petitions of the matriarchs in the names they gave to their sons. It was a common custom in the ANE for parents to give

¹⁷³ Cf. 3.2.1 above; and the names given by Jacob's wives to their children in Gen 30.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Jer 33:11; Pss 22:22-23; 40:9-10; 52:9; 66:16; 116:14,18; 118:21-24.

¹⁷⁵ Sarna (1989: 205-6); cf. Westermann (1985: 472,477).

their children names which expressed their faith or thanks to the deity who granted them.¹⁷⁶

The explanation of the first four names of Leah's sons allude one way or other to her previous prayer, though God's help was not acknowledged in the birth of every child (e.g. the children of Leah's maids). The name Reuben was explained as 'Yahweh has seen my affliction', ראה יהוה בעניי. Similarly, Simeon's name is explained as 'Yahweh paid heed to my affliction', שמע יהוה אל-ענייך, suggesting that he was an answer to Leah's earlier prayer to Yahweh. That Yahweh was one who sees and hears the afflicted is already demonstrated in the story of Hagar (16:11,13). Whether this was a folk etymology or not, it fits well with the circumstances of Leah who was isolated and longing for her husband's affections.¹⁷⁷ Although no religious reasons are given for the birth of Levi, his name still describes Leah's frustration for failing to attract Jacob's attention, despite being the more fertile sister. By contrast, the name Judah is explained as 'praise to Yahweh',¹⁷⁸ despite no improvement in her relationship with Jacob as hoped for when she bore Levi. It is possible that by this name she acknowledged God's goodness despite her husband's constant distancing of himself from her. Thus 'as in the psalms, lament turns to praise.'¹⁷⁹ The author sees the matriarch as one who believed in Yahweh and prayed to him in her most difficult circumstances.

Similarly, the names of Rachel's legal children allude to her previous prayer. Like Sarah, it is now Rachel's turn to obtain children through her maid Bilhah.¹⁸⁰ Here is the clearest indication of Rachel's petitionary prayer. While the name Dan is explained as 'God's vindication', which it was, Rachel clearly alludes to her previous prayer, שמע בקלי, 'he heard my plea' (cf. Ps 54:3,4). Given the circumstance, it is impossible that she did not resort to prayer, especially when her own sister could bear children. She could have all the love of her husband and could even blame him in vain for not giving him children. Jacob's sharp retort, 'Am I in the place of God who denied you fruit of the womb?' probably helped her to turn to God in prayer. Similarly, the name of Naphtali whom Bilhah bore next probably reflects Rachel's 'contest or struggle for God's favour', אלהים נפחולי. While this difficult phrase could mean 'mighty struggles', 'divine struggles', or 'struggles in prayer',¹⁸¹ the context suggests that it refers to both Rachel's struggle for God's favour and her struggle against her sister, as she explains in the following phrase, נפחלתי

¹⁷⁶ Cf. note 32; biblical examples: Jonathan = 'Yahweh has given (this child)'; Jehoachin = 'Yahweh strengthens us'; Fowler (1988: 17f.).

¹⁷⁷ Wenham (1994: 243); cf. Fowler (1988: 167); Sarna (1989: 206-7).

¹⁷⁸ Or 'may God be praised'; Millard (1974: 216-18); Fowler (1988: 165).

¹⁷⁹ Wenham (1994: 244).

¹⁸⁰ For an infertile wife to provide her husband with a concubine in order to obtain children is widely attested in the second millennium sources in the ANE; *ANET* (160 par. 27; 172 par. 144; 543); for the protection of the concubine's rights, *ANET* (172 par. 146; 525); cf. Sarna (1989: 119).

¹⁸¹ Cf. Delitzsch (1889: 175); Dillmann (1897: 241); Andersen (1969: 200); Fokkelman (1975: 135f.).

עם-אחתי.¹⁸² By now the problem was no longer childlessness but a competition as to who would bear more sons to her husband.

In her bid to outdo Rachel, Leah follows her sister's method and through her own maid Zilpah obtains Gad and Asher. These names contain no immediate relevance to her prayer, though their etymology may be traced to certain Assyrian or Canaanite deities.¹⁸³ Similarly, no prayer seems to be involved for the subsequent birth of Leah's own sons, Issachar and Zebulun. The author's comment, 'God hearkened to Leah', probably implies his belief that conception and children are granted by God alone, not by the magic to which both sisters resorted. Thus the author dismisses 'the notion that such superstitions may have any validity. Leah, who gives up the mandrakes, bears three children; Rachel, who possesses them, remains barren for apparently three more years.'¹⁸⁴ However, there is a double allusion to Rachel's prayer for Joseph. Rachel was successful in her struggle against her sister when she obtained children through her maid, but this did not take away her reproach as barren woman. It is the birth of Joseph that took away that shame. Thus Joseph's name is explained by two Hebrew verbs, *הסר* and *הוסיף*, 'take away' and 'add'.¹⁸⁵ While Rachel's prayer for her reproach to be taken away is implied in the name, her prayer wish for another son is made explicit. Thus the name prayers are not peculiar to the matriarchs. They are common in the ANE, as we have already noted in examples from Mesopotamia.

3.4.4. Intercessory prayer

As has been noted above, intercessory prayer may take the form of petition or complaint or even confession depending on the context. There are several instances of intercession by Abraham and Isaac in the patriarchal narratives. We shall deal with each separately.

Abraham's intercession for Sodom: One of the most familiar intercessions of the Bible is the prayer of Abraham for Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:23-25 cf. vv. 27-32):

Although this passage is set in the form of dialogue 'its character as intercession is unmistakable'.¹⁸⁶ The dialogue is initiated by Yahweh himself, first by stating in his soliloquy (vv. 17-19) that he would not hide from Abraham his intentions about Sodom,¹⁸⁷ and secondly by actually declaring them in Abraham's hearing (vv. 20-21).

¹⁸² Wenham (1994: 245f.); cf. Sarna (1989: 208).

¹⁸³ *TDOT* (2: 382-84); Strus (1978: 67 n.29); Fowler (1988: 96,135); Sarna (1989: 208f.); Wenham (1994: 246).

¹⁸⁴ Sarna (1989: 209); cf. Wenham (1994: 247); contrast Westermann (1985: 476).

¹⁸⁵ Sarna (1989: 210).

¹⁸⁶ Miller (1994: 267); cf. Clements (1986: 20).

¹⁸⁷ The author probably did not view Abraham as a prophet in the traditional sense, although another text described him as such when he interceded for Abimelech (21:7). Nevertheless, Abraham's role here reminds

This sets the dialogue in motion. Abraham promptly responds to God's decision but with extreme caution, acknowledging his utter unworthiness to question God's decision. However, his plea for Sodom is less concerned than his pleas for a son or for an heir through Ishmael.

The address, introduced with the non-technical word **וַיֹּאמֶר**, indicates the informal nature of the intercession. There is in fact no address proper, as Abraham's speech begins with not a name or epithet but a question, further highlighting the total dialogical nature of this prayer (cf. Gen 17:18). In what follows, Abraham's speech accepts God's judgement over Sodom, but questions the destruction of the righteous along with the wicked, since this contradicts God's position as 'the Judge of all the earth'. The speech goes even further to press God, although with humility and caution, to pardon the wicked for the sake of the few righteous who might be in Sodom. While God defers to this request, Abraham makes no further plea and the dialogue breaks off. There is nevertheless no idea of repentance in this story, suggesting that the tradition is ancient and compatible with patriarchal religion. The social and moral situation in Sodom may be comparable with that of the time of Noah, but the description of the latter does not even contain the idea of intercession.

Further, while we have no parallels to Abraham's prayer in the ANE, Moses' prayer for disobedient Israel is similar to it though more passionate, since Moses even wished to forego himself for Israel's sake. Abraham's prayer may be one of the moral peaks in the patriarchal narratives, but this is not sufficient justification for ascribing the whole passage to the post-exilic period, as some scholars do.

For Abimelech: Here we have only the report of prayer, as the prayer itself is not recorded (Gen 20:17):

Abraham is introduced by God as prophet who would intercede for Abimelech (20:7). The two most important characteristics of a traditional prophet - that he stands in the council of God (as pictured in the story of Sodom), and that he prays for others - are probably behind the description of Abraham as prophet.¹⁸⁸ But the traditional reason given for the former that the prophet was called to carry his message to his people is not given here, though God spoke to him both in dreams and face to face in human form. The reasons for the latter are not clear. The traditional prophet assumed the function of an intercessor either on his own initiative or at the request of others, but Abraham was given this function. It is not certain how important it is for the narrator to portray Abraham as a prophet, since traditional reasons for this role do not fit neatly. Indeed, Abraham is portrayed here not only as cheating and lying but also as one who could not trust God for his safekeeping, whereas Abimelech is viewed as innocent and righteous. This is not the portrait of a prophet in general in the Old Testament. So the word prophet, **נָבִיא**, is probably

us of later prophets who stood in the councils of God (Amos 3:7; Jer 23:9,18,21,22). Cf. Westermann (1985: 286-87).

¹⁸⁸ For a prophet's varied role in Israel, see Carroll (1969: 407).

not used in a technical sense,¹⁸⁹ nor can it be conceded that it is used because of the function of Abraham as intercessor.¹⁹⁰ Therefore the notion that it was the idea of a later author to portray Abraham as a prophet is not likely. It is probable that the word is used in the sense of a mediator who simply passes on the divine blessing despite his own personal moral deficiencies. Or, more probably, it was simply because of Abraham's relationship with Yahweh that he was asked to pray for Abimelech. In the ANE kings were the mediators of blessing who interceded for the healing of their people and for the averting of divine judgement (e.g. the plague prayers Mursilis).

Further, more than the patriarch, the Canaanite king Abimelech is portrayed as one aware not only of sin and guilt but also of how to compensate for his unwitting sins. So anyone intending to portray the father of the nation would not have included such a story unless his concern was other than the glory of the patriarch. It appears that more than prayer or religion of Abraham, the story reveals God's relationship with and commitment to him. The focus of the passage seems to be, not the prayer or piety of Abraham, but God's protection of him and Sarah in order that God might bring about the promises he had made to them.

Isaac's intercession (Gen 25:21): Here is another occasion where the prayer itself is not recorded, only the report of it. This may be regarded as a prayer of petition, since Isaac's prayer was essentially for himself. However, the fact that Rebekah is described as barren suggests that the problem was more Rebekah's than Isaac's, given the social stigma attached to barrenness. It is not clear why Rebekah herself did not pray for her problem as did Leah and Rachel later. In this regard Isaac's prayer may be called intercession.

The word עָתָר used in this context has no inter-human usage in the Bible, suggesting that its particular focus is on God's response to prayer.¹⁹¹ Its usage elsewhere in Moses' plague aversions (Ex 8:8-9,28-30; 9:28; 10:17-18) and in David's entreaty to avoid famine and pestilence on Israel (1 Sam 21:1-14; 2 Sam 24:25) suggests that it was more an entreaty on behalf of others than for oneself.¹⁹² In the case of David's entreaty, ritual sacrifices followed the prayer. It is not certain if this was involved with Isaac's intercession. In keeping with the patriarchal practice, Isaac as the head of the family interceded for his wife. This not only reflects the patriarchal social and religious background where there was no formal cult or priests, but also reveals Isaac's personal relationship with God.¹⁹³ This is made clear by his involvement in the formal cult in Gen 25:25, where he is described as building an altar and calling upon the name of Yahweh.

¹⁸⁹ So Westermann (1985: 324).

¹⁹⁰ Pace Dillmann (1897: 120-21); Carroll (1969: 402 n.4).

¹⁹¹ Miller 1994: 41); cf. note 86.

¹⁹² Cf. Manasseh's entreaty for himself in order that God may restore his kingdom and his former status (2 Chr 33:12-13,19).

¹⁹³ Cf. Westermann (1985: 412).

Isaac's piety is also revealed in his blessing of his children which we shall examine below. Thus patriarchal prayer, like their sacrifices, is family oriented and unique in comparison with the prayers of the ANE and Israel.

3.4.5. Prayers of blessing

We have several prayers of blessing in the patriarchal narratives which are equally important for our understanding of the religion of the patriarchs. The patriarchal blessings focus particularly on increase, protection and fulfilment of promises previously made to them. We shall examine the marriage blessings of Rebekah and Jacob, Isaac's blessing of his sons, and Jacob's blessing^{of} Joseph, his sons and the other tribes of Israel. However, the blessing of the Canaanite king Melchizedek will not be discussed since it does not proceed from a patriarch.

Marriage blessings: Gen 24:60 records the blessing of Rebekah by her family after she had decided to go to Canaan to marry Isaac.

This is probably one of the most ancient forms of blessing, in which the occasions of farewell and marriage are combined together (cf. 28:3).¹⁹⁴ Structurally, the subject of the blessing, God, is missing, probably because Rebekah's family did not worship the same God as Abraham. Thus it was probably left ambiguous. The content focuses entirely on the prospects of marriage, fertility and the possession of land. These are particularly appropriate for prospective brides and grooms, though the blessings pronounced on women are especially related to their fertility.¹⁹⁵ This is confirmed from Ugaritic sources, in that the marriage blessing of fertility pronounced on Keret is ultimately related to his future wife who would bear sons and daughters to Keret.¹⁹⁶ The setting of this blessing is the family and there is no cult involved. Thus it reveals the family-oriented religion which is compatible with the patriarchal society.

Gen 28:3,4 records Isaac's blessing of Jacob when the latter was sent to Paddan-aram to secure a wife from the family of Rebekah. The occasion of marriage and farewell and the family setting are similar to that of the blessing of Rebekah noted above. There are, however, a few differences of structure and content. The structure is balanced with the clear invocation of the ancient name of God, אֱלֹהֵי שְׂרָיָה, while regarding content the promise of land in the blessing of Abraham, is passed on to Jacob. The form and setting clearly indicate the antiquity of the blessing. But it is radically different from Isaac's earlier blessing of his sons in which the idea is not of a prayer wish but of a blessing which when uttered is irrevocable and works independent of divine agency.

¹⁹⁴ Westermann (1985: 390).

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Ruth 4:11,12; 1 Sam 2:20; Miller (1994: 283).

¹⁹⁶ ANET (146).

Isaac's blessing: Isaac's blessing (Gen 27:27-29) is different from that of a normal blessing in Israel or ANE.

Before we discuss the form and content of the blessing, a few general remarks are in order. First, it is not clear why Isaac had to have a meal before the blessing. The view that it was a 'festal meal', 'part of a pre-cultic rite' which is an 'early form of the later cult meal', and that this was to give strength in order to pass on the vital power through blessing, is dubious.¹⁹⁷ The text says that Isaac was old and about to die and he wanted to bless his beloved son Esau before he died. But before he did so, he wanted to enjoy Esau's game which he loved so much (27:1-4 cf. 25:27-28). Thus the meal serves more to fulfil a desire before death than to give strength for a blessing.¹⁹⁸ Secondly, besides being a prayer wish, the blessing reflects an apparent magical element which eludes the power of God or the one who blesses once it is uttered, so that neither of them can revoke its effects or duplicate the blessing, not even when the deception of Jacob is taken into account. A similar view operates in regard to the curse in the oracle of Balaam as the story seems to focus on the importance of the prevention of its utterance.¹⁹⁹ A closer look at the blessing, however, suggests that it is not simply a magical formula that operates apart from God's activity. The 'jussive form' clearly indicates its divine origin even as God is clearly invoked in the blessing.²⁰⁰ As for its irrevocable nature, Miller plausibly suggests that it is 'a kind of performative and declarative speech', as in our modern day wedding ceremonies in which the 'declaration itself makes legal and real the marriage of the couple ... The notion of effective power in blessing is not far from this kind of performative speech.'²⁰¹ In Deuteronomy, God also makes such performative statements about the land which he had promised the fathers he would give to Israel, suggesting that these provided a 'religio-legal claim upon the land'.²⁰²

The form differs from the usual form of blessing. It begins, not with the usual formula, 'Blessed be so-and-so', but with the exclamation, 'How beautiful is the smell of my son...', just like the blessing of Balaam in Num 24:5, 'How beautiful are your tents...' Both these blessings not only assume divine agency indirectly but also perceive that God has already blessed the recipient, and they both have to do with the future. So the pronouncement of blessing was only a formality for what has already been blessed by God.²⁰³ The content of the blessing contains three elements, namely fertility, dominion and protection, but not posterity or land.²⁰⁴ The first of them is more appropriate to Jacob than

¹⁹⁷ *Contra* Westermann (1985: 440).

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Brichto (1963: 205f.).

¹⁹⁹ Brichto (1963: 5,208f.) refutes the view that there is magical element behind these blessings or curses.

²⁰⁰ Miller (1994: 288).

²⁰¹ Miller (1994: 287).

²⁰² Miller (1994: 287).

²⁰³ Cf. Westermann (1985: 440); Sarna (1989: 192).

²⁰⁴ Sarna (1989: 192); Wenham (1994: 210).

Esau, for whom the blessing was originally intended. The last of these, dealing with curses, is repeated in identical form in Balaam's oracle and was also given to Abraham. All of them, however, anticipate the future blessing of Israel during the monarchy.²⁰⁵ The blessing may suggest several points pertinent to the religion of the patriarchs. First, the apparent magical element in it indicates its antiquity and the authenticity of the tradition, while the form and content^{show} the origin of the blessing as being God alone. Secondly, Jacob's deception is highlighted, but there is no remorse or repentance for the act on the part of the one who had deceived. This clearly suggests that the patriarchal traditions are not aware of the Mosaic legislation on sin and guilt. Thirdly, the informal family setting of the blessing further confirms the family-oriented religion of the patriarchs.

Jacob's blessing: Jacob gives two blessings, one of Joseph and his sons (Gen 48:14-16, 20) and the other of his twelve sons (Gen 49:1-27). Both are occasioned by his anticipated death. Only the former, however, contains the usual form of blessing, while the latter, though widely called 'the Blessing of Jacob', contains material of mixed nature, such as blessings and curses, praise for natural abilities and reproof of weaknesses, prophecy and observations of geographical and historical nature. Because of this, several scholars have entitled it 'The Last Words or The Testament of Jacob'.²⁰⁶ Nevertheless, the final author views the whole section as the blessing of Jacob (v. 28). It contains a clear reference to a formula of curse analogous to the formula of blessing (v. 7), although it lacks the usual formula of blessing. Thus it is not surprising that many scholars see it as a collection of tribal sayings which arose either independently or together but were expanded with time and finally was placed in the context of P by a redactor.²⁰⁷

First, we shall deal with the Jacob's blessing of Joseph's sons. The context of the blessing has several reminiscences of blessing Jacob himself extorted years ago from his father Isaac. Like Isaac, Jacob is on the deathbed and, can't see well. The kiss and embrace are similar to the kiss and the physical contact Isaac made with Jacob. And in both cases the younger receives the elder's blessing. The form is that of a usual blessing, but with an unusual introduction in which the God who is invoked is variously described as the one who led his ancestors Abraham and Isaac and who protected Jacob on his way and delivered him from all evil. The content of the blessing is a prayer wish for the perpetuation of the names of all the lads' ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,²⁰⁸ and a wish for the increase of the recipients²⁰⁹ a wish traditionally granted to all the patriarchs by God. Further, it is added that their names will be used as paradigms of blessing in future

²⁰⁵ Cf. Sarna (1989: 192); Wenham (1994: 209f.).

²⁰⁶ Clements (1986: 36); cf. Gevirtz (1975: 104-12); Sarna (1989: 331); Wenham (1994: 468).

²⁰⁷ Westermann (1986: 220-22).

²⁰⁸ Cf. Mendelsohn (1959: 180-83).

²⁰⁹ That their numbers were really increased is shown in Num 26:28-37 cf. 1:32-35; Deut 33:17; Jos 17:14-18.

Israel.²¹⁰ The form and setting is very much at home with the patriarchal lifestyle. The invocation of God and his angel, who were closely watching over Jacob's sojourn in Mesopotamia, clearly relates to Jacob's personal experience and religion oriented as they are to the patriarchal nomadic lifestyle.

Secondly, there is Jacob's blessing of his own sons, the eponymous tribal leaders. It is a farewell address at Jacob's deathbed. The occasion is similar to that of the blessings given by Isaac and Moses (cf. v.1f. with Deut 33:1f.).²¹¹ The blessing starts with a summons to the sons of Jacob to come and hear 'what shall befall you in days to come.' Jacob is probably viewed as a prophet by the author as the phrase באחרית הימים usually occurs in prophetic eschatology.²¹² However, the author in v. 28 states that the blessing concerned not with just the twelve sons of Jacob but with 'the twelve tribes of Israel'.²¹³ Thus the author thinks that what Jacob said in blessing his sons became true of the tribes in their historical development. The fact that the author was speaking retrospectively has not been concealed, but points to the author's belief that the blessing in its kernel originated with Jacob himself. The blessing actually begins with a curse or more precisely a reproof of the firstborn son Reuben for defiling his father's marriage bed (v.4, cf. 35:22). This appears to reflect a knowledge of the law of Lev 20:10, but the latter is more precise about the punishment of death for such a crime. Reuben was deposed of his position and pre-eminence as the firstborn. This was fulfilled as the status of the firstborn in Israel was assumed by the tribe of Levi and the Reubenites themselves became insignificant among the Israelites.²¹⁴ However, the author of Gen 49 does not seem to be aware of the special privileges assumed later by the tribe of Levi, because 49:5-7 still portrays Levi as a secular tribe with no hint of its future sacerdotal status. Further, the lack of territory as a punishment for Levi's conduct conflicts with the special status and the priestly grants conferred later on the tribe. Thus Jacob's words here are based on a very early tradition.²¹⁵ Verse 7 clearly uses the curse formula for the anger and wrath of Simeon and Levi in massacring the Shechemites. The form is similar to the form of blessing: 'cursed be so and so'. The word used for curse, אָרַר, means 'to ban, or to exclude from the company of'. This refers not just to their anger and wrath which are the objects of the verb 'cursed', but also to the later deprivation of the independent status of Simeon and Levi. This is clarified in the next sentence, 'I will divide ... I will scatter ...' This probably suggests that they

²¹⁰ Cf. similar formulae in which Rachel, Leah and Peres are used as paradigms of blessing (Ruth 4:11-12), and Zedekiah and Ahab as paradigms of curse (Jer 29:22f.).

²¹¹ Deut 33 may be compared to Gen 49 in form and setting. But Judg 5:14-18 is part of a thanksgiving prayer in the form of blessing. Even though this passage reproves or praises certain tribes, it is based on non-participation or participation of them in the battle. Thus it has no clear parallel to Gen 49, *pace* Westermann (1986: 221).

²¹² The only other occurrence of this phrase in the Pentateuch is in Num 24:14; Westermann (1986: 223).

²¹³ This is the first mention of the twelve tribes in the OT. Wenham (1994: 487).

²¹⁴ Cf. Wenham (1994: 472-73).

²¹⁵ Cf. Num 3:12f.; 8:14-18; 16:9f.; 18:20-24; Sarna (1989: 334).

would no longer work together and ultimately become powerless. This was what had happened to them by the time of the monarchy, when the tribe of Levi was nearly non-existent as a tribe and Simeon had been assimilated into Judah.²¹⁶

However, Jacob's words about Judah contain no form of a blessing, though the intention is clear. Judah was praised for his lion-hearted courage in battle and blessed with lasting hegemony and fertile territory (vv. 8-12). Since the reasons for these are not immediately apparent, diverse interpretations have been put forth. Some are based entirely on Judah's earlier life in Genesis,²¹⁷ others on the immediate context of Judah being raised to the status of the firstborn since the first three sons were denied it due to misbehaviour or bad temper,²¹⁸ and still others on the tribe's later history, such as Judah claiming kingship for the tribe,²¹⁹ or the other tribes recognising him as lord.²²⁰ Westermann takes it in two parts in keeping with his traditio-historical approach. The first (vv. 8,9) is a praise of Judah for his heroic deed in battle in the period of Judges; the second (vv. 10-12) is a promise of a future, not eschatological, leader. While all these views are recounted from the past history of Judah, the final author probably believed that they were the result of Jacob's blessing on his death-bed.

The next son or tribe to receive blessing is Zebulun (v. 13), although he was younger than Issachar according to the birth narratives and generally precedes him in the territorial allocation of the land (Gen 30:17-20; Num 34:25f.; Jos 19:16,17). That Zebulun was more powerful than his older brother is suggested by the primacy accorded to him in the blessing of Moses and the Song of Deborah.²²¹ The author probably views the tribe's significance in Israel and its prosperity at sea as the result of Jacob's blessing. By contrast, Issachar (vv. 14,15) was blamed for his passive submission to the Canaanites. He is described as a strong but lazy ass who sacrificed his freedom for a peaceful livelihood. Contrary to the policy of the infiltrating Israelites, he became a forced labourer or 'corvée', *on*, to the Canaanites.²²² This word occurs also in the Amarna archives in a letter from the king of Megiddo to the king of Egypt: 'I alone bring men for the corvée from the town of Yapu. They come from Shu[nama] ... Sunem lies in the territory of the tribe of Issachar, and it is possible that those here brought into forced labor belong to this tribe.'²²³

The blessing once again turns to praise in vv. 16,17, this time of the tribe of Dan, the first of the concubine tribes. Unlike Issachar, Dan will maintain its independence,

²¹⁶ Brichto (1963: 88); cf. Jacob (1934: 895-900); Westermann (1986: 226-27); Sarna (1989: 335); Wenham (1994: 475).

²¹⁷ Good (1963: 427-32); Carmichael (1969: 435-44).

²¹⁸ Cf. Wenham (1994: 473).

²¹⁹ Holzinger (1898: 257f.).

²²⁰ Cf. Gunkel (1902: 423f.); Skinner (1930: 519).

²²¹ Deut 33:18,19 and Judg 5:14,18; Sarna (1989: 338).

²²² Jos 16:10; Judg 1:28,30,33 cf. Ex 1:11; 1 Ki 9:21; Westermann (1986: 234).

²²³ Westermann (1986: 234); cf. *ANET* (485); Rainey (1970b: 194); Alt (1989b: 148f.); Sarna (1989: 340); Wenham (1994: 480).

despite its failures. The snake metaphor indicates that he was small but capable of surprise attack in the manner of guerrilla warfare. Thus he holds his own in his struggle for survival and will not give into forced labour. The blessing fits well with the struggles and exploits of Samson, the future Danite.²²⁴ At this point, the patriarch suddenly calls for divine deliverance (v. 18), which is probably a petition for strength to finish the blessing, or possibly a petition for the precarious position of the tribe.²²⁵

The next three tribes, Gad, Asher and Naphtali, are praised for various reasons. Gad's defence against marauding bands is reflected in its many wars with neighbours.²²⁶ Asher will succeed in foreign trade, though it failed to subdue the most important cities in its territory (Judg 1:31f.). The blessing of Naphtali, however, cannot be related to a specific event of its history, except that he will love freedom and mobility.²²⁷

Just as the curse formula is used in regard to Simeon and Levi, the blessing formula is used for Joseph (49:22-26). The mood is entirely positive, and the blessing is extravagant. A number of titles, including the ancient name Shaddai by which God revealed himself to the patriarchs, are used to describe the God who was invoked to bless Joseph. The blessing itself contains three elements. First, Joseph is described by a metaphor of an animal or a plant.²²⁸ In either case the metaphor illustrates the increase and freedom of the tribe. Secondly, Joseph's patient endurance in the hands of his hostile enemies is attributed to the help of the God of Jacob,²²⁹ who is described with various titles such as 'the Mighty One of Jacob', 'the Shepherd and the Stone of Israel'²³⁰ and El Shaddai. Thirdly, God's blessing on Joseph will surpass the blessing Jacob himself had received. The blessing includes the fertility of land, humans and mountains, all yielding their best for Joseph, thus making him special among his brothers.²³¹ Finally, Jacob blesses his youngest son Benjamin, who is described as fierce and aggressive in contrast to defenceless Joseph. The future exploits of Benjaminites are probably in view. The blessing, however, is probably ancient since there is no allusion to Saul's kingship in it.²³²

Thus from the author's point of view Jacob's curse and blessing, although it reflects a knowledge of the historical Israel, was a prayer wish of the dying father. He reprimanded some of his sons for their weaknesses and commended others for their good conduct, and wished God's blessing for many of them, especially Judah and Joseph.

²²⁴ So, Delitzsch, Dillmann, Driver, König; cf. Wenham (1994: 481).

²²⁵ Sarna (1989: 341); Wenham (1994: 482); *pace* Westermann.

²²⁶ Judg 11; Mesha inscription, lines 10-13; 1 Ki 22:3; 2 Ki 10:33; Cf. Deut 33:20; Sarna (1989: 341).

²²⁷ Cf. Westermann (1986: 236); Sarna (1989: 342).

²²⁸ Animal: Gunkel, Speiser, Gevirtz, Sarna and Wenham. Plant: Westermann.

²²⁹ Cf. Sarna, Wenham; for Westermann, this refers to the tribe of Joseph.

²³⁰ This unusual title, instead of the usual 'Rock of Israel', was probably an earlier title that derived from the traditions about Jacob setting up stone pillars at Bethel (Gen 28:18,22; 35:14). The fact that the other titles, 'God of your father' and El Shaddai, also occur in the Bethel episodes (28:13; 35:11) suggests that the blessing is very ancient. Sarna (1989: 344); cf. Wenham (1994: 486).

²³¹ Westermann (1986: 240-41); cf. Wenham (1994: 487)..

²³² Judg 3:15-30; 5:14; 19; 20; 1 Sam 10-14; Sarna (1989: 345); Wenham (1994: 487).

Jacob's blessing is compatible with his faith in the God of his fathers and his experience with this God all his life.

3.5. Conclusion

The form of prayer in patriarchal narratives is similar to the form we observed in the ANE and Israel, although the address, with no laudatory epithets, is even more informal and simpler than could be found in Israel. The range of problems which prompted people to approach the deity is similar in the ANE and Israel, but it is much narrower in the patriarchal narratives. Here there is only one reference to prayer for healing (20:7,17), and it was not for a patriarch himself.²³³ There is no prayer prompted by sin and guilt,²³⁴ oppression by enemies²³⁵ or abandonment by the deity,²³⁶ although patriarchs were said to have experienced all these problems in one way or another. It is unlikely that patriarchs going through such problems would not have turned to their God for help, but to record and preserve people's experiences of divine help in such situations would be a concern for the organised cult and society. The only common factor for which petition was made in the ANE, Israel and the patriarchs is the problem of childlessness. This was a relevant issue for the patriarchs because of its association with the promise of land, which was as much of interest to Israel as to the patriarchs. Therefore, its preservation in the history of the origins of the nation is hardly surprising.

The setting of prayer in the ANE and to a large extent in Israel is the organised cult, whereas with the patriarchs it is entirely the family or other informal situations. The most revealing of all the types of their prayer in this regard is the prayer of blessing. While the occasions for the blessing in all the cultures, including patriarchal, were identical, the setting of patriarchal blessing was distinct from others, in that it was never cultic. Further, one of ^{the} distinctive aspects of patriarchal blessing is the possession of land. While this is pertinent to their lifestyle, it is not found elsewhere.

As for the theology, in contrast to the ANE and Israel, prayer or sacrifice is not used as a means to an end in the patriarchal narratives. While prayer is assumed in the context of building altars and offering sacrifices, prayer as petition never occurs in the context of ritual or sacrifice. Thus it is precluded from being manipulative or magical as in the ANE or Israel, although it does occur as an inducement in Jacob's vow. The concepts

²³³ Sickness (Gen 48:1) was not a matter of concern for prayer or ritual as in the ANE.

²³⁴ Although cheating and deceit were acknowledged (Gen 25:29ff., 27:35,36; 32:10-13,21; cf. Gen 29:25; 31:7,9,26 [גנב], 27 [גנב]); 'offence', פשע, and 'sin', חטאת (31:36) refer to a violation of norms.

²³⁵ Jacob accuses Laban that he was oppressed, ענה, (31:42), but there is no confession of sin.

²³⁶ Abraham blamed God for his childlessness and waited for a long time, but he did not lament because God deserted him (Gen 15:3; 16:15; 17:1).

of worship, קרא בשם, entreaty, אחר, thanksgiving and blessing, ברך (in both cases), most naturally occur in contexts which suggest that there was no standardised meaning behind them as in later Israel. Prayer is entirely preserved as a conversation between the patriarchs and God. The intercession of Abraham is the most telling example of this. Thus the content, setting and theology of prayer in the patriarchal narratives is distinct from the concept of prayer in both the ANE and Israel. This fits well with the practice and concept of sacrifice in the patriarchal narratives which we discussed above. Having seen the patriarchal response to theophanies and to their attitude to prayer, it is appropriate to consider now Jacob's peculiar action of raising pillars in response to theophanies.

Chapter 4

Sacred Pillars

4.1. Introduction

Along with building altars and offering prayers, raising pillars¹ forms part of patriarchal pattern of worship, although this is attested only in the Jacob cycle. While Jacob is also known to have built altars in response to theophanies, raising pillars appears to be his special response to theophanies. However, pillars were strongly proscribed in later Israelite history as symbols of Canaanite religion and inappropriate in Yahweh's worship. This raises several questions: 'Why were the pillars approved in the patriarchal narratives while they were condemned in Israelite worship? What was their nature and function in cult? Who wrote the patriarchal texts? Were they not familiar with the Yahwistic ethos?' We have little evidence to answer these questions adequately from the patriarchal stories themselves, and later Israelite history shows a mixed attitude towards cultic pillars, sometimes approving and at others condemning.

On the other hand, much has been made of Jacob's erecting stone at Bethel, and it has been identified with sacred stones and *baetyls* of Aramaic and Greek texts of later times. *Baetyls* or *baetylia* as meteorite stones occur on Roman coins and in classical Greek writings from the first to the fifth centuries AD. An unbroken tradition about the deity Bethel occurs in vassal treaties and in theophoric personal names from the early seventh to the late fifth centuries BC, and again in Greek writings and inscriptions from the first to the third centuries AD. The expression בתי אלהים which occurs in the Sefire texts from the eighth century BC has been regarded as a Semitic counterpart to the Greek *baetyls*, since the Semitic word sounds like its corresponding Greek word. Thus it is generally argued that these *baetyls*, as described in different literature, are evidence for the popular notion that certain stones were indwelt by deities and were therefore 'sacred stones'. In the same way scholars also suspect that the stone pillar, מצבה, erected in Gen 28:22 by Jacob, who called it בית אלהים, was a *baetyl* too. Scholars think that the deity *Bethel* is also present in certain OT texts including the Jacob narratives. These issues raise serious problems about the religion of the patriarchs, which is described in Genesis as a precursor to, yet distinct from, the later Yahwistic monotheism. In this chapter we re-examine the evidence in both the ANE and the Bible in order to see whether raising pillars was compatible with other activities of patriarchal worship such as building altars and calling upon the name of

¹ Pillar and *maṣṣēbāh* are used synonymously in this chapter.

Yahweh, or was it a form of stone worship whose original context was removed in order to conform with the general Yahwistic ethos of the patriarchal religion portrayed in the narratives.

We shall first deal with the evidence related to *baetyls* and then with that of the Greek deity *Betylos* and its Semitic counterpart *Bethel* in extra-biblical literature, and see what these entities have in common with the popular sacred stones. Then we shall examine the evidence in biblical and extra-biblical sources concerning מצבות. Finally we shall note the relationship between these different phenomena, and see how this enhances our knowledge of patriarchal religion in Genesis.

4.2. Sacred stones outside the Bible

4.2.1. *Baetylia* and *Betylos*

Baetyls are meteoric stones with magical qualities and *Betylos* is the name of a west-Semitic god. Both of these occur in Philo, but with little connection between them. *Sacred stones* are those which represent certain gods and/or stand at a sacred place and thereby become objects of worship. In this sense certain pillars (*maṣṣēbāh*) can be considered sacred stones, but by no means all. Thus these three entities must be differentiated, although some overlap between them may be admitted. However, generally little distinction has been made between them in scholarly writings. In the early eighteenth century, Bochart identified *baetylia* with the anointed stone pillar of Jacob, describing *baetylia* as 'anointed stones'. In their attempt to imitate Jacob, the Phoenicians 'first worshipped the stone which the patriarch had set up; then they anointed and consecrated other stones, and called them *baetylia*, *baetyli*, in memory of the stone at Bethel.'² Bochart's equation was subsequently taken over by lexicons, encyclopaediae and commentaries³ and became popular with several archaeologists,⁴ despite the objections

² Bochart (1707: 784,785); cf. Moore (1903: 206); Zuntz (1945: 182-88).

³ *DB* (1: 278); *RLA* (1: 392); Gunkel (1902: 282); Skinner (1930: 380); Eliade (1958: 228-30).

⁴ Evans (1901: 113,118,192-96), for instance, constantly uses *baetylia* in the sense of *maṣṣēbāh* (113); he talks about the 'sanctity of baetylic stones and pillars' (118) and of a *baetylic* temple, but in this there is no evidence of a *baetyl* (192-96). Moreover, Evans derives the idea of 'baetylic qualities' from the 'meteoric origin' of an object and the idea of meteorites from the name 'Baetylos'. But in Philo, as we know, Baitulos had no such origin; cf. Cooke (1930: 26,161-67), who equates Zeus stone with a *baetyl* and makes no distinction between pillars and *baetylia*. But see Eissfeldt's (1962: 230 n.1) refutation of Evans.

The trend continued even much later in Teixidor (1977:38-39). While distinguishing the god Baitulos from *baetylia*, he confuses the latter with Greek stele and popular cult stones: 'The cult of the steles or *baetyls* was universally accepted in the ancient Near East. Accordingly, it is not surprising to find holy stones of various forms associated with the cult of a particular deity. To the cult of the steles of Astarte or Melqart we may add the cult of the baetyl of Zeus Casius frequently represented on the coins of Seleucia Pieria.' So also Mettinger (1995: 35), who refers to the scholarly convention in which the word *baetyl* is used as a designation for a cultic stone, but he does not go to the origin of the idea. Later he uses the terms *baetyl* and *stele* synonymously (p. 96).

raised by some.⁵ Though any original distinction between these entities has been almost completely ignored by scholars, we shall argue from the evidence that a distinction can legitimately be maintained.

Baetylia are mentioned as 'animated' stones in Philo, as meteorite stones with magical powers in Pliny, and as indwelt by demons, animated, magical, and associated with different gods in Damascius. We shall discuss first what the texts say and how the scholars understand them.

The earliest mention of *baetylia* is to be found in the Phoenician history of Philo of Byblos (2nd century AD),⁶ preserved mainly in the works of Eusebius (about 260-340 AD).⁷ Philo claims to have translated it from the original by Sanchuniaton of Phoenicia.⁸ The word *baetylia* and *Baitulos*, the name of a god in Sanchuniaton's theogony, occur once each in Eusebius:

And when Uranus knew it, he sent Eimarmene and Hora with other allies on an expedition against Kronos, and these Kronos won over to his side and kept with him. Further, he says, the god Uranus devised the Baetylia, having contrived to put life into stones.⁹

And Uranus, having succeeded to his father's rule, takes to himself in marriage his sister Gé, and gets by her four sons, Elus who is also Kronos, and Baetylus, and Dagon who is Siton, and Atlas. Also by other wives Uranus begat a numerous progeny ...¹⁰

It is plain from the texts above that *baetylia*, the 'animated stones', and *Baitulos*, the son of Uranus, occur quite separately in Philo. Neither the context in which they occur nor the purpose for which *baetylia* were invented suggests that they were related to the god *Baitulos*. The context suggests that Uranus had hoped that *baetylia* would somehow help him in his war against Kronos. Apart from these suggestions, we have no indication in Philo of how *Baitulos* was related to *baetylia*,¹¹ which are more colourfully described in later Greek and Latin writers.

With the description of Pliny (early first century AD), *baetylia* acquire the quality of meteorites. Pliny treats *baetylia* as a sub-category of *ceraunia* stones ('thunder-stones'). Pliny claims to have been informed about them from Sotacus of Karystos.

Sotacus distinguishes two other varieties of the stone, a black and a red, resembling axe-heads. According to him, those among them that are black and round are supernatural objects; and he

⁵ Dillmann (1897: 337); Driver (1948: 268); Smith (1927: 210); Moore (1903: 203,205,208).

⁶ Moore (1903: 198); but Zuntz (1945: 180) thinks that the earliest occurrence of *baetyls* in literature is in Sotakos of Karystos, whose comprehensive work on gems is now lost, but whose words are preserved in Pliny, of the early first century AD. This apparent discrepancy is due to the uncertain date of Sanchuniaton, who is usually dated between the late second millennium and the early to mid-first millennium BC.

⁷ Gifford (1903: 35). Porphyry, who is quoted in Eusebius, dates Sanchuniaton during or before the Trojan war. The works of Sanchuniathon were translated into the Greek by Philo of Byblos.

⁸ Barr (1974: 17,31) and Løkkegaard (1954: 74,76), however, doubt the authenticity of Philo's tradition as coming from Sanchuniaton.

⁹ Gifford (1903: 42); cf. Baumgarten (1981: 15,16).

¹⁰ Gifford (1903: 41).

¹¹ Cf. Løkkegaard (1954:68); Barr (1974:28 n.1); Baumgarten (1981:203).

states that thanks to them cities and fleets are attacked and overcome, their name being 'baetuli,' while the elongated stones are 'cerauniae'.¹²

Pliny's description of precious stones in general is more scientific than religious, but it is the information from Sotakos that ascribes magical qualities to *baetylia*. But there is no indication in Pliny as to the origin and nature of *baetylia*, although it is possible that he regarded them as meteorites since he treats them under the category of 'thunder-stones'.

By contrast, Damascius' *Vitae Isidori* (early 6th century AD),¹³ describes *baetylia* with religious qualities reminiscent of Sotacus. *Baetylia* are pictured by Damascius as globular objects moving through the air, usually whitish in colour and a hand span in diameter, but sometimes turning purple or changing size. They could be hidden in garments or carried in hands by their attendants (worshippers) but could not be controlled by them. They had lettering and holes on their sides through which they gave oracles. The attendants would make requests and prayers and the *baetylia* would respond in oracles. They were dedicated to one or other of the Greek gods, such as Kronos, Zeus or Helios. The *baetyl's* attendant regarded it as divine, while Isidorus thought that it was moved by a demon which was neither harmful nor altogether pure.¹⁴ However, the exact connection of the *baetylia* with these particular gods is unclear. Possibly the tradition represented in Damascius knew an association of certain stones with certain gods in earlier writings.

Other evidence for *baetylia* is their depiction on Roman coins from the late third century BC to the third and fourth centuries AD.¹⁵ This is often claimed as the best evidence for their being regarded as objects of worship in Phoenicia. The stelae depicted on the Tyrian coins are apparently regarded as *baetyls* by several scholars.¹⁶ But this interpretation is doubtful firstly, because they do not resemble the *baetylia* we discovered in Philo or classical Greek literature. Secondly, the epigraphy on the coins says, ἀμβροστε πατρε, 'ambrosial rocks'.¹⁷ The shape and the writing suggests that they are probably cultic stones or altars. Thus strictly speaking none of the extant Phoenician coins depict a *baetyl*, although Phoenicians and Sidonians had coins at least from the fifth and third centuries BC respectively. On the other hand, 4th century Sidonian coins depict a Persian king in a chariot with a goat underneath, and coins of the same period from Tyre depict Melqart holding a bow and riding over the waves on a sea horse.¹⁸ However, the absence of *baetyls* on Phoenician coins does not prove that the Phoenicians did not regard them as objects of worship.

¹² Eichholz (1962: 273-75).

¹³ The Neo-Platonist, Damascius, was born in about 480 AD. *EB* (6: 998).

¹⁴ Zintzen (1967: 274,276). Cf. Moore (1903: 199-200).

¹⁵ Hill (1899: 266,271,272).

¹⁶ Baumgarten (1981: 202); cf. Mettinger (1995: 95,96).

¹⁷ Mettinger (1995: 96).

¹⁸ Head (1909: 40,41,61,93,109).

Nevertheless, the foregoing discussion suggests that a distinction between *baetylia* and *Betylos* can be maintained since, as Moore notes, 'there is no evidence either from Semitic sources or Greek or Latin authors that the name *baetylus* was ever applied in antiquity to the class of objects which modern archaeologists habitually call "baetyls"; on the contrary it was the distinctive designation of an entirely different thing.'¹⁹ While *baetylia* were magical stones associated with demons or gods, for Philo *Baetylos* was a son of Uranus and Gē. He does not appear in Hesiod's theogony.²⁰

4.2.2. *Betylos* and sacred stones

In some classical Greek writings, contemporary with the Greek literature which mentions *baetylia*, we have evidence for a different type of stones which can be called 'sacred stones' or a type of cultic *maṣṣēbôth*.²¹ These are different because firstly they are not called *baetylia*, and secondly they are larger and were probably erected by humans, though they are also linked with Kronos and Zeus in Greek mythology. They are mentioned in Philo, Hesiod, and Pausanias. Philo has this account:

And Astarte set the head of a bull upon her own head as a mark of royalty; and in travelling round the world she found a star (ἀστέρᾱ) that had fallen from the sky, which she took up and consecrated in the holy island Tyre.²²

It may be noted here that the word used for this particular object is *astera*. But Milik interprets it as referring to *baetyls* associated with the cult of the Phoenicians.²³

Finally I consider as highly probable the Sidonian origin of the worship of god Betyl. The information of Philo on the meteorite set at Tyre is probably only a fragment of a more developed hagiographic legend. The *betyl* par excellence of Astarte, kept at first in Tyre, would have been then transferred to Sidon; one of the successive epitomists of Sanchouniaton would have transcribed only the beginning of the sacred account.

In Hesiod's theogony²⁴ we have an explicit mention of a stone associated with Kronos. Being told that one of his sons would overthrow him, he began swallowing his offspring as they were born. But his wife was advised by her parents to hide the last of his

¹⁹ Moore (1903: 208). Moore thinks they were pre-historic stone implements. Cf. Baumgartner (1981: 203).

²⁰ Hesiod's Theogony has no *Baitylos*. It has six sons and six daughters to Ouranos, Kronos being the youngest of all, whereas Philo's Theogony has four sons to Ouranos, Kronos being the first of them. It appears that these are two different traditions of the same myth, one Greek, the other Phoenician, and probably one is worked into the other, and it is not certain which is borrowing from which. Philo probably hellenised the Phoenician myth, as several scholars suspect (e. g. Løkkegaard, Barr).

²¹ *Maṣṣēbāh*, in contrast to *baetyl*, usually refers to a standing stone erected by humans rather than a natural stone that attracted curiosity or wonder. The stone erected by Jacob in Gen 28:14 is called a *maṣṣēbāh*.

²² Gifford (1903: 43).

²³ Milik (1967: 575,572); cf. Teixidor (1977: 38).

²⁴ Hesiod is dated between the eleventh and fifth centuries BC, while some parts of Hesiod (e.g. Agon) are thought to be not earlier than the second century AD. Mair (1908: xxv,xxvi,xxxvii); Banks (1873: v, 8-9).

sons, and gave Kronos a *large stone* instead of the infant Zeus whom he was about to swallow:

But to the great prince the son of Heaven, former sovereign of the gods, she gave a huge stone [μέγαν λίθον], having wrapped it in swathes: which he then took in his hands, and stowed away into his belly, wretch as he was ... And first he disgorged the stone, since he swallowed it last. This stone Jove (Zeus) fixed down upon the earth with-its-broad-ways, in divine Pytho, beneath the clefts of Parnassus, to be a monument thereafter, a marvel to mortal men.²⁵

It is clear that this is a large stone (μέγαν λίθον) and is nothing like a *baetyl*, and it was set up as a sign or monument. The story is probably an aetiological account of a sacred stone. There is an interesting parallel to this in Pausanias's *Description of Greece* (second century AD), in which he describes a stone at Delphi which was believed to be the one that Kronos had vomited.

Ascending from the tomb [of Neoptolemus] you came to a stone of no large size. Over it every day they pour oil, and at each feast they place on it unworked wool. There is also an opinion about this stone, that it was given to Cronus instead of his child, and that Cronus vomited it up again.²⁶

Some scholars doubt that the stone at Delphi was brought from Crete, since direct evidence is lacking. For Moore: 'The probability is that the foreign myth was simply attached to an old Zeus stone at Delphi, just as the scene of the deception of Kronos was located at Chaeronea. In later times the terminus on the Capitol at Rome was identified with the stone which Saturn had swallowed ...'²⁷

Thus it is clear from Philo, Hesiod and Pausanias that *baetylia* and 'sacred stones' were two different types of stones. In Philo and Pliny *baetylia* are not associated with a god, though they were in Damascius. By contrast, a large 'Zeus-stone', unmentioned in Philo, Pliny or Damascius, was associated especially with Zeus in Hesiod and Pausanias. Also the concepts associated with these stones are clearly different. One was an animated and magical stone while the other was a sacred stone, a substitute for Zeus himself, and was openly worshipped and offered sacrifices. This stone was not called pillar or stele, although one may surmise that the idea associated with its 'setting up' might suggest that of a *maṣṣēbāh*. The evidence for the worship of *baetylia*, however, is lacking.²⁸

If *baetylia* and 'sacred stones' were different, how were they related to the deity Bethel or *Baetylos*? Is there a real connection as often supposed by scholars, or do the words happen to sound alike? Interestingly, we have some third century AD Greek inscriptions which could refer either to the animated stones *baetylia* or to the god *Baetylos* mentioned in Philo, while Zeus and certain other gods were associated with a certain

²⁵ Banks (1873: 26-27). Greek words are from Evelyn-White (1982: 114).

²⁶ Jones (1935: 511).

²⁷ Moore (1903: 202,203).

²⁸ Cf. Zuntz (1945: 178,79).

Baetylos. An inscription on an altar dedicated to Zeus Baetylos recovered from Syria at Dura-Europos reads:

To [his] national god Zeus Betylos, [god] of the dwellers along the Orontes, Aurelius Diphilianus, soldier of the 4th Legion Scythica Antoniniana, has dedicated [this altar].²⁹

And at Kafr Nabu an oil mill dedicated to Seimios and Symbetylos has this inscription dated from 224 AD:

To Seim(i)os and Symbetylos and Leon, ancestral gods.³⁰

There are two inter-related issues here. Firstly, is the word *betylos* appended to Zeus and Sym a mere substantive of *baetylia* or of the deity *Baitylos*, or is it connected to the Semitic word Bethel? Opinions are divided. Eissfeldt is inclined to argue that in Philo of Byblos *baetylia* as 'animated stones' and *Baitylos* as deity were differentiations of the root idea *bait-il*, as 'power' and 'person' just as in Genesis *bêt'ēl* was originally the name of a god and subsequently also that of a stone.³¹ It must be observed, however, despite Eissfeldt's ingenious suggestion, that *baetylia* and *Baetylos* occur independently in Philo. Except for the identical form of the word, there is no suggestion that the god was associated with the stones. Nor was he associated with them in the later writings surveyed above. On the other hand, it was Kronos and Zeus and other gods of the Greek pantheon who were associated with *baetylia*, not *Baetylos*. The association between the stone and the god, if *bethel* can be translated as the name of the god, is much more suggestive in the Genesis story than in Philo.³²

Similarly Seyrig, following Eissfeldt but especially commenting on the inscription at Dura, argues:

Betylos is a Greek transcription of the Semitic compound *bethel*, that means *house of El*, and was used in ancient Semitic worship to describe the cult-stone in which El was considered as being present. By and by, the central place given to this object in ritual promoted it to the rank of an independent god, known as the god Bethel, who at last took advantage of his prominent function to supersede and to evict the former and less materially present owner of the cult-place. Ultimately the word *betylos* became a Greek substantive, and was applied to any baetyl, any stone that seemed to draw supernatural power from the presence of a deity.³³

Seyrig's suggestion is equally ingenious, but lacks firm evidence to support it. It can be conceded that the ancients believed that certain stones were indwelt by deities or

²⁹ Seyrig (1933: 68-71). Seyrig mentions that two high-places discovered near Aleppo were dedicated to 'Zeus Bomos' and 'Zeus Madbachos', and that the words appended to Zeus are obviously related to the Semitic terms 'high-place' and 'altar' respectively. We may suggest from these high places that 'Zeus Betylos' was probably another altar.

³⁰ Porten (1968: 172); cf. Hyatt (1939: 86). Both Porten and Hyatt identify Symbetylos with Eshembethel of Elephantine.

³¹ Eissfeldt (1962: 229-31).

³² We shall return to this subject below.

³³ Seyrig (1933: 69); so also Teixidor (1977: 87).

demons, but Seyrig does not give any instance of a cult-stone in Semitic worship in which El was believed to have dwelt and to which worship was directed. Further, it is uncertain whether Seyrig is correct in his theory of the origin of the god Bethel. Seyrig's final sentence quoted above once again confuses *betylos* and *baetylia*, which originally had no connection in Philo or in other Greek or Latin writings.³⁴ The Syrian deities in the above inscriptions, e.g. Zeus Betylos and Symbetylos plus Eshembethel of Elephantine, were originally Aramean deities like the deity Bethel.³⁵ Thus *betylos* appended to the names of deities was probably related to the deity Bethel rather than to the 'animated stones' or *baetylia*. The former was a well-known west-Semitic deity known in Phoenicia,³⁶ Babylon,³⁷ Elephantine, Erech and Nippur.³⁸ It is possible that this deity's name had survived by its identification with popular gods of later times.

The inscribed objects at Dura and Kafr Nabu therefore may be regarded as commemorative rather than representative of the gods themselves. Altars were built to offer sacrifices. They were certainly regarded as sacred and were sometimes deified, but were distinct from 'sacred stones', which by their very nature were considered indwelt by a deity and worshipped. The stones that fall in this latter category are: the 'Kaaba' at Mecca, the 'Linga' of Shiva,³⁹ the Zeus-stone at Delphi,⁴⁰ etc. The inscription at Kafr Nabu is probably dedicatory, with no sanctity implied for, or worship directed to, the oil mill.⁴¹ The altar and the oil mill were certainly not *baetylia*, nor were they 'sacred stones' in which the representative gods were believed to have dwelt, nor was there any suggestion that worship was directed to them as to the other 'sacred stones'. Therefore *baetylia*, *Baitylos* and 'sacred stones' attested in the classical Greek writings and other inscriptions were distinct from each other.

But what about the stone pillar, מצבה, erected by Jacob in Genesis 28, and the occurrence of El Bethel along with it? Do these suggest that Jacob believed that the stone was the abode of the deity Bethel? Do Jacob's actions of anointing the stone and pouring a drink offering over it imply that Jacob worshipped the stone or the numen inside it? However, we can note at this point that the connection between the Semitic god Bethel and the stone erected by Jacob in Genesis is tenuous, because in the three instances where the

³⁴ See note 19 above.

³⁵ Porten (1968: 172,73).

³⁶ *ANET* (534). Philo's *Betylos* was probably the Greek equivalent of the Semitic god Bethel.

³⁷ Hyatt (1939: 86).

³⁸ Porten (1968: Appendix V).

³⁹ Shiva is one of the three popular gods (along with Brahma and Vishnu) of the Hindu pantheon. 'Linga' is a cylindrical black stone representing Shiva in most Hindu temples in India. The stone is anointed and offerings are made to it. 'Salagrama' is another black stone found in the river Gandaki in Nepal, and is regarded as the abode of Vishnu. *ERE* (11: 872).

⁴⁰ In Roman history two other stones were considered sacred: the stone which was believed to be the abode of the mother goddess Cybele, brought from Asia Minor in 204 BC as a protection during the war with Hannibal, and the sacred stone believed to be the seat of the Oriental Sun-god at Emesa, introduced by the Emperor Elagabalus in the third century AD. *ERE* (11: 50,51).

⁴¹ In India, however, implements of work are dedicated and worshipped during the Dasharah festival.

word Bethel occurs (Gen 28:18-22; 35:1-11; 9-15) the focus is the place, not the commemorative stone. One might interpret the word Bethel here as the name of a god (cf. 31:13), but it does not fit the context. Moreover, there is no suggestion in the stories that the stone served as an abode for a god. The Hebrew imperfect יהיה in 28:22 indicates that the stone monument 'will become', but is not yet, the house of God.⁴² The separation of God and the stone can be more tellingly seen in 35:13-15 where God is said to have 'gone up' from Jacob from the place where he was speaking with him, after which Jacob erected a pillar and called the 'place' Bethel. For the author, God, the pillar and the place are all distinct from each other in the story. It will be appropriate to discuss the extra-biblical evidence on מצבות before we consider the biblical evidence on the מצבה erected by Jacob.

4.2.3. *Maṣṣēbāh*

Certain standing stones, rocks and boulders have been considered sacred in many parts of the world because of their appearance or position, and in many cases they have been identified as deities with sacrifices offered before them.⁴³ Our concern, however, is only with the standing stones or *maṣṣēbôth*. The word מצבה comes from the Hebrew verb נצב, 'to erect, set up',⁴⁴ and refers to objects set up by humans, usually stone monuments. Out of 36 occurrences in the Hebrew Bible, מצבה is governed by the verb עשה only once (2 Ki 3:2). This suggests that מצבות were usually set up, not made.⁴⁵ The RSV translates this word usually as 'pillar', but also twice as 'stump' (Isa 6:13), and once as 'obelisk' (Jer 43:13).⁴⁶ Archaeological discoveries shed considerable light on various types of מצבות in biblical texts which would have remained inexplicable otherwise.

It must be conceded, however, that there is no absolute distinction between the cultic stones and some of the other kinds of stones found in archaeological discoveries. Interpretation is based on their shape, position and physical context.⁴⁷ The *maṣṣēbôth* found in Palestine, Syria and Phoenicia generally lack inscriptions or carved figures, which makes it even more difficult to interpret their precise meaning, and the few inscribed stones found in Palestine are all of foreign origin or influence, which suggests that inscription on

⁴² Dalglish (1992: 709).

⁴³ Stone-worship in East Africa, India and Madagascar has been connected with ancestral spirits. Prayers are offered to them to secure favours, e.g. to protect fields. Oaths are taken before them, and they are used in divination. Cf. 'Lia Fail' (stone of destiny) at Tara in Ireland with which the Coronation Stone is identified. *ERE* (11: 864-67); 870-76); cf. *ERE* (14: 50,51).

⁴⁴ Other verbs like שים, קים and רום are also used for its setting up. The LXX translates the word as στήλη. Derivatives of the root נצב are found in most Semitic languages with similar or identical meaning. *EnBib* (3: 2975).

⁴⁵ *Contra* Burrows (1934: 46).

⁴⁶ Of the thirty-six times in the Hebrew Bible, the word occurs eleven times in Genesis alone: 28:18,22; 31:13,45,51,52[x2]; 35:14[x2],20[x2]; Other occurrences: Ex 23:24; 24:4; 34:13; Lev 26:1; Deut 7:5; 12:3; 16:22; 2 Sam 18:18; 1 Ki 14:23; 2 Ki 3:2; 10:26,27; 17:10; 18:4; 23:14; Isa 6:13; 19:19; Jer 43:13; Ezek 26:11; Hos 3:4; 10:1,2; Mic 5:12; 2 Chr 14:2; 31:1.

⁴⁷ Mettinger (1995: 141-42).

stone was a custom common to imperial cultures.⁴⁸ Thus we cannot be certain that a particular pillar found in excavation represents a particular stone mentioned in the biblical sources, although several archaeologists suggest near certainty about some of them.⁴⁹ Thus it has been suggested that the architectural and artefactual remains of Iron II Palestine reflect the religion of the united and divided monarchic period largely as aniconic compared with the premonarchic period.⁵⁰ The Israelite personal names found on seals and inscriptions from the eighth century BC suggest to Tigay that the majority of Israelites worshipped Yahweh rather than other gods.⁵¹ However, this interpretation has been strongly contested by other scholars.⁵² Nevertheless, archaeological findings confirm that most of the Egyptian grave stones and some of the Assyrian royal stelae, besides being memorial, also functioned as cultic stones. The bronze gate of Balawat, for instance, depicts sacrifice in front of a royal stele erected beside the god Hirbe.⁵³ The royal stele itself does not become the focus of worship here, but it points to the sanctity of the place and encourages worshippers to practise the cult of that deity. Thus material evidence becomes useful if used judiciously.

4.3. מצבות in Israel

4.3.1. Types of מצבות

Having examined evidence from outside Israel, now we shall look at archaeological data from Israel and texts from the OT on מצבות.

Archaeologists divide מצבות into four main categories: legal, memorial, commemorative and cultic.⁵⁴ A fifth category of those found in non-cultic contexts is too insignificant to consider here, since there are only two such references in the OT: Isaiah 6:13, where a tree stump is referred to as מצבה, and in Ezekiel 26:11, where the destruction of מצבות bearing a building structure is referred to. We shall examine each category separately.

⁴⁸ Graesser (1972: 35).

⁴⁹ Excavations at Byblos, Hazor, Shechem, Tirzah, Megiddo, Lachish, Arad and Jerusalem uncovered a number of pillars of various sizes, and scholars suggested parallels between them and a number of מצבות mentioned in the biblical sources. For a survey, see Aharoni (1967: 233-49); Graesser (1972:50-56); Avner (1993: 166-76); Mettinger (1995: 140-191); for problems of general interpretation, see Dever (1987:209-247).

⁵⁰ Holladay (1987: 249-99).

⁵¹ Tigay (1986: 41; 1987: 157-94).

⁵² Albertz (1994: 64-65,95-99,187f.).

⁵³ ANET (277); for other royal stelae erected in sacred precincts, see ANEP (442-44,447). Graesser (1972: 44-45) thinks that these Assyrian royal stelae served all the four functions noted here.

⁵⁴ Graesser (1972: 34-63); cf. ERE (11: 877-81); Eliade (1958: 217-19); Avner (1984: 115-31; 1993: 166-81); Mettinger (1995: 32-35).

Legal stones: These were erected to remind individuals or groups of treaties or boundaries between them. Examples existed already in the third millennium Sumerian city-states.⁵⁵ The eighth century Sefire inscriptions and the famous Hammurabi code may also be included in this category.⁵⁶ From the Hebrew Bible the cairn set up by Jacob and Laban (Gen 31:45-52), the twelve מצבות erected by Moses (Ex 24:4), and the covenant stone of Joshua at Shechem (Jos 24:26-27) may be identified with them. Sometimes these stones served as witnesses to a covenant treaty and as documents on which the terms of the covenant were written (cf. Deut 27:1-8; Josh 8:30-35).

Several scholars, however, have argued that the Sefire stelae were 'sacred stones' like the *baetylia* or the מצבות of Jacob.⁵⁷ The only reason for this is the description of them as בתי אלהים, 'houses of gods', in the inscriptions. These scholars, in fact, translate this phrase as *baetylia* or 'sacred stones'.⁵⁸

ומן יעא
רם להלדח ספרי א אע לן מן ב
תי אלהים אן זי ירעשמן ו
יעא מן בתי אלהים ויאמר ל
בחע יאעלהים ובלחץ עלב ימת האע.

[whoever] has it in mind
to efface these inscriptions from
the sacred stones where they were written and
from the sacred stones, and says to ...
the sacred stones, then by crushing
torment [let him] ...

Jacob's מצבה was also called בית־אלהים, 'house of God'. Nevertheless, as we have argued above, a distinction must be made between *baetylia*, 'sacred stones' and *maṣṣēbāh*. The Sefire stelae cannot be called *baetylia*, nor can they be called 'sacred stones' like that of the Zeus-stone of Delphi, to which frequent sacrifices were offered. There is no suggestion in the inscriptions that any worship was directed to these stones.⁵⁹ Furthermore, sacred stones usually had neither inscriptions nor image, since it was believed that carving would be disturbing and offensive to the indwelling spirit.⁶⁰ They were certainly מצבות, but were they cultic מצבות? The fact that they bore the treaty inscriptions suggests that they were legal stones, but they were not regarded as witnesses to the treaty, even though no less than nineteen different gods were called by name, besides the gods of the open country and the cultivated land, and gods like heaven, earth, springs, day and night, as witnesses to the treaty sealed in those inscriptions.⁶¹ It is possible that the stones were viewed as cultic מצבות, in the sense that they marked the sacred area where the treaty had been sealed, and the words בתי אלהים could refer to the temples where the treaty had been made and where the stones had been preserved.

⁵⁵ King (1916: 126ff.); cf. *ANEP* (298-302); the *kudurru* boundary stones of Babylon depict land deals, royal grants and symbols of deities, *ANEP* (454,518-21); cf. Graesser (1972: 37,38).

⁵⁶ Graesser (1972: 38,39).

⁵⁷ Dupont - Sommer (1958: 119); *KAI* (259,262); Fitzmyer (1967: 90); *TSSI* (2: 30); Mettinger (1995: 35).

⁵⁸ *TSSI* (2: 44). Texts and translations in the following are from Gibson unless indicated otherwise.

⁵⁹ So also *TSSI* (2: 45).

⁶⁰ *ERE* (11: 871-72).

⁶¹ Incidentally, El and Elyon occur together here.

Memorial stones: These were ubiquitous as funerary stelae in Egypt.⁶² Besides being memorials, they often marked the grave of the dead and the place where funerary offerings were to be made.⁶³ Sometimes they were covered with inscriptions and pictures of the dead which both indicated their needs in the other world and memorialised them. Aramean stones of early first millennium Syria bore reliefs depicting the deceased sitting at a banquet table, sometimes with a servant in attendance, suggesting the importance of food or offerings for the dead.⁶⁴ Such stones were, however, relatively less common in Assyria and Babylon, though the memorial function of stelae was well-known.⁶⁵ We have probably two examples of memorial מצבות in the Hebrew Bible. One is the pillar erected by Jacob on Rachel's grave (Gen 35:20).⁶⁶ The other is 'Absalom's monument' that was meant to ensure the continuance of his memory since he had no son to 'cause his name to be remembered' (2 Sam 18:18). The reason given for erecting the pillar precludes it being a funerary stele.⁶⁷ There is a superb example of a memorial *maṣṣēbāh* from Phoenicia, erected during a man's lifetime.⁶⁸

Commemorative stones: These point to significant events or to individuals who played important roles in them. The most obvious examples of such *maṣṣēbôth* are the victory stones erected by kings to extol their exploits to the generations to come. There are examples of such stelae set up by the Egyptian pharaohs Seti I and Ramases II at Bethshan and by Shishak at Megiddo.⁶⁹ Biblical examples can be found in 1 Sam 7:12 and 15:12, where Samuel and Saul set up stone monuments to commemorate victories over their enemies.⁷⁰ Stelae which commemorate a special sacrifice like the *mlk*-sacrifice have been found in the sacred precincts among the first millennium Phoenician colonies of North Africa and the Mediterranean islands.⁷¹ A number of 'votive stelae' with inscriptions have also been found in sacred precincts, showing that worshippers often promised to offer sacrifices or erect stelae if the deities granted deliverance from natural calamity such as

⁶² Graesser (1972: 39); cf. *ERE* (11: 881); Spronk (1986: 94) thinks that the tombs of the Egyptians also functioned as memorials.

⁶³ The purpose of gravestones in central India, however, was to provide a temporary dwelling for the soul and to prevent it from roaming about and becoming dangerous. It is believed that stones thus inhabited by ancestors were instrumental for fertilising crops and women. Eliade (1958: 217-19).

⁶⁴ *ANEP* (630-33,635); Wooley (1939-40: 14, pl.III).

⁶⁵ More than 130 stones were found within the city walls at Assur memorialising kings and important officials, Graesser (1972: 40,41). But direct evidence for the cult of the dead is decisively lacking, although indirect references are found in the ritual texts; the Mari texts are an exception where fuller accounts of royal funerary cult are given, see Bayliss (1973: 115-124).

⁶⁶ *TNSI* (60); cf. Procksch (1924: 384), for whom it represents the cult of the dead; for von Rad (1965: 341) and Westermann (1985: 555), it is only a land mark with no religious significance. Cf. 2.4.4.

⁶⁷ Cf. Graesser (1972: 40); cf. 2.4.4.

⁶⁸ *TNSI* (62).

⁶⁹ *ANET* (253-55; 263,64; 284); cf. *ANEP* (320-21). Interestingly, no cultic pillars are found throughout the Bronze Age at Megiddo; Mettinger (1995: 175-78).

⁷⁰ While the stone set up by Samuel was called *אֶבֶן*, Saul's monument was called *מִצִּיבָה*.

⁷¹ Graesser (1972: 42). These were probably the same as the child sacrifices to Molech in the Bible (2 Ki 16:3; Jer 32:35).

flood (Assur-nadin-apli),⁷² impotence (a Hittite),⁷³ or enemies (Ben-Hadad).⁷⁴ Is Jacob's pillar erected at Bethel in Gen 28:18-22 and 35:14 a votive stele commemorating the appearance of Yahweh in that place? Ben-Hadad's stele was raised in fulfilment of a vow while Jacob's pillars were set up in response to the deity's appearance in a particular place. One of these pillars, however, became a focal point for making vows. We shall return to this subject below when we consider these texts in detail.

Cultic stones: The most frequent occurrence of pillars in biblical sources is in religious contexts, hence they are called 'cultic stones'. Cultic pillars found in archaeological discoveries usually stood at the entry or boundary of a sanctuary or by the side of an altar, and were thought to 'mark the place where the deity is in some manner immanent, so that worship offered there reaches him or her.'⁷⁵ In this sense cultic *maṣṣēbôth* occur several times in the patriarchal stories where Jacob erects a מצבה, probably to mark the immanence of the deity, and makes vows before the pillar (Gen 28:18-22). Later he returns to the same place and erects an altar and a pillar, both to worship God and to commemorate his appearance (Gen 34:7,9-14). Jacob's pillars are not condemned in these texts, but later Israelite history shows a mixed attitude towards cultic pillars, sometimes approving and at others condemning. Therefore we shall first consider why the pillars in the Israelite cult were approved at times and condemned at others, and then see how such an attitude helps us understand the positive view of the מצבות in the patriarchal stories.

4.3.2. Cultic מצבות in Israel

As noted earlier, most of the pillars found in Palestine are plain with no pictures or inscriptions carved on them, while those from Egypt and Mesopotamia are covered with images and inscriptions. A notable number of stelae with large figures of deities, mostly without inscriptions, can be found in Syria,⁷⁶ indicating a 'fusion' of these two traditions.⁷⁷ It appears that such stelae found their way into Israel through international alliances by different monarchs. The 'מצבה of Baal' erected in the Baal temple in Samaria (2 Ki 3:2; 10:26-27 cf. 1 Ki 16:32,33) probably came from Syria through the influence of Jezebel, at whose table 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah used to dine (1 Ki 18:19). This implies that these cults freely flourished during the reign of Ahab, but it is

⁷² Weidner (19330-31: 14); *RLAC* (9: 1058).

⁷³ A worshipper in a Hittite text vows, among other things, to raise a pillar or a statue if the deity granted him children. *ANET* (350).

⁷⁴ The Ban-Hadad stele (860 BC) to Melqart. The same verb נָצַב, 'to set up', is used here as in the biblical texts. Albright (1942: 23-29); cf. Della Vida - Albright (1943: 30-34); *ANET* (655).

⁷⁵ Graesser (1972: 44); Mettinger (1995: 32,191).

⁷⁶ The votive stele of Melqart mentioned above, and the stone at Jekke are exceptions since they bear inscriptions as well. *ANEP* (499,500); cf. Barnett (1948: 122-37).

⁷⁷ Graesser (1972: 45,46).

not clear whether the 'מצבה of Baal' was a figured stone where Baal's image was carved,⁷⁸ or simply a stone pillar erected next to the altar marking the sacred area, or a pillar representing Baal himself. De Moor suggests that, since Baal was a fertility god, the pillar was a symbol of this fertility, just as the cult object Asherah was the symbol of the fertility goddess Asherah.⁷⁹ It is possible that the pillar of Baal was both an image of Baal and a witness to the cultic transaction that took place on the altar between the worshippers and the worshipped. However, this is the only instance in the Bible where a מצבה was associated with a particular god as *asherah* had always been with the goddess Asherah.

The pillars, עמדים, not מצבות, before Solomon's temple may well reflect the influence of Solomon's alliance with various foreign nations. Their function may have been legal, as their names Jachin and Boaz suggest,⁸⁰ as well as cultic, marking the sacred area (1 Ki 7:21).⁸¹ Hosea's complaint that Israel 'improved' her מצבות (Hos 10:1,2) probably refers to such pillars,⁸² and especially to the popular cult where they were openly worshipped as symbols of Yahweh's presence. The prophet may have been cynical about Israel's cult objects, but the fact that he did not openly condemn them suggests a certain degree of acceptability in Yahweh worship. Alternatively, מצבות may have formed part of Israel's illegitimate worship which subtly incorporated the calf-worship of popular Baalism into official Yahweh worship.⁸³ The pillar, a standard cultic object in Baal worship, probably continued in Yahweh worship as the former was adapted to the latter.

Hosea, however, appears to refer to מצבות positively in 3:4, where they seem to form part of the official cultic furniture along with sacrifice,⁸⁴ ephod and teraphim, all of which presumably aid in seeking Yahweh (v. 5). Interestingly, ephod and teraphim are never mentioned along with pillars as part of the Canaanite cult that was condemned. The ephod, as part of the sacred vestment of priestly apparel, probably belonged to the official Israelite cult and functioned as a divinatory apparatus (1 Sam 30:7-8; Judg 18:5).⁸⁵ But its association with teraphim and its description elsewhere (Judg 8:27; 17:5; 18:14,17,18,20; 1 Sam 21:9) suggests that it could be an idol,⁸⁶ or at least an image of the original ephod described in the priestly texts. Yet it is uncertain if by ephod Hosea meant an idol. Teraphim, on the other hand, were images of deity in varying sizes which were used in household shrines and could be consulted (Gen 30:19, 34; 1 Sam 19:14-16; cf. Ezek 21:21; Zech 10:2). It is possible that Hosea was cynical about Israel's cultic life, since

⁷⁸ Cf. *TNSI* (104).

⁷⁹ De Moor (1974: 443).

⁸⁰ If these are the first words of dynastic oracles, as Graesser thinks, they can certainly have legal as well as cultic functions. 2 Ki 11:14 and 23:3 clearly suggest this.

⁸¹ Graesser (1972: 46).

⁸² Burrows (1934: 46).

⁸³ Cf. 2:8,13,16,17; 4:17; 8:4-6; 9:10; 10:5-6; 11:2; 13:1-2.

⁸⁴ Which probably stands for altar. So LXX, Syriac, Vulgate.

⁸⁵ Haran (1978: 166f.).

⁸⁶ Harper (1936: 221).

verse 5 says that Israel would 'return and seek' Yahweh their true God and David their true leader after these (privileged?)⁸⁷ cultic symbols had been denied to them for a while. It could also possibly mean that they would seek Yahweh by these very symbols. However, in the light of Israel's harlotry with Baalism referred to above, it is unlikely that the prophet considered these symbols as legitimate in Yahweh worship. A close reading of Hosea suggests that it is national idolatry, often called harlotry, which shattered the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel. So it is improbable that the prophet considered *מצבות* as legitimate symbols in Yahweh worship, although it is certain that they constituted part of the official cult at Bethel and symbolised the presence of Yahweh or Yahweh himself.⁸⁸ Otherwise it is impossible to account for the strong offence the pillars caused to the loyalist Yahwists of Josiah's time who violently smashed them to pieces and burnt them down along with altars, high places, images, idols and *asherim* of the Canaanite cult (2 Ki 23:4-20).

Isaiah is probably the first of the prophetic books to give a more positive picture of *מצבה* in the Israelite cult: 'In that day there will be an altar to Yahweh in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to Yahweh at its border. It will be a sign and a witness to Yahweh of hosts in the land of Egypt' (19:19,20a). The altar and the pillar are probably in poetic parallelism, implying worship of Yahweh by both the Israelites and the converted Egyptians following the shaking of Yahweh's hand over the latter. The distinct locations of each, however, suggest distinct functions. The altar in the centre of the land indicates Yahweh's worship among the Egyptians, probably by the exiled Israelites at a later date, as the phrase 'in that day' suggests. The 'pillar to Yahweh at its border' cannot be connected with the altar, firstly because it was probably meant to be a 'border stone',⁸⁹ and secondly because the pillar, not the altar, would be a sign and a witness to Yahweh in the land of Egypt. If this text was an addition by a later author, as several scholars think,⁹⁰ it would be impossible for a redactor to associate a pillar with Yahweh's worship as he would have certainly known not only the Deuteronomists' objections to *מצבות* but also the prophet's own attitude to idols and images, not to mention the contempt of a later Isaianic writer for idols and their makers.⁹¹ It is probable that the author purposely dissociated the pillar from the altar so that it would not be mistaken for an obelisk common to Egyptian temples. The *מצבה* was not a cultic stone but most probably a memorial stone⁹² which commemorated Yahweh's acts on behalf of the oppressed Israelites and revealed Yahweh's power to the Egyptians who would acknowledge him in worship.

⁸⁷ McNeile (1908: 145). Cf. Driver (1911: 248).

⁸⁸ 2 Ki 3:2; 10:26. Cf. Mays (1969a: 58); Stockton (1982: 18-22).

⁸⁹ Gray (1912: 338).

⁹⁰ Gray (1912: 332ff.); Kaiser (1974: 108ff.).

⁹¹ Isa 2:8,18,20; 10:10,11; 19:1,3; 21:9; 30:22; cf. 44:9-20; 57:13, etc.

⁹² Cf. Young (1969: 38-39); Kaiser (1974: 108).

מַצְבוֹת are mentioned in Jeremiah only once (43:12,13), when Jeremiah prophesied that Nebuchadnezzar would destroy Egyptian temples and the pillars/obelisks of Beth-shemesh.⁹³ The pillars or obelisks, originally symbols of the sun-god Atum Re, were probably plain stones marking the cultic area in the Egyptian temples. The exiled Israelites were probably attracted by this cult and Jeremiah's preaching was directed to them. Jeremiah's own view about pagan worship is obvious from his general contempt for, and ridicule of, idols and idolatry in Israel and Babylon.⁹⁴ It is not certain, however, why מַצְבוֹת, which were certainly present in Israel's cult during Jeremiah's time, did not feature in his condemnation of Israel's idolatry.

Ezekiel similarly prophesied that Nebuchadnezzar would destroy the city of Tyre and its 'mighty masseboth' (Ezek 26:11). The reference to pillars, however, is ambiguous as they might refer to the supporting structures of the buildings,⁹⁵ but if they refer to the famous pillars of gold and emerald in the temple of Melqart,⁹⁶ it confirms that the prophet held pagan worship in contempt. While Ezekiel's condemnation of Israel's idolatry is obvious,⁹⁷ he makes no mention of מַצְבוֹת, which were probably present in Israel's worship during his time, probably for the same reason as Jeremiah, that they did not specifically represent the deity.

Of all the prophets, Micah was most unambiguous about the illegitimacy of pillars in Yahweh's cult (5:12-14). Pillars were condemned along with sorceries, soothsayers,⁹⁸ images⁹⁹ and asherim,¹⁰⁰ all of which formed part of the Israelite cult. The text is generally considered as exilic or post-exilic, but proscription of idolatry can be seen already in the first three chapters (e.g. 1:7), which are generally taken as authentic. Indeed it was because of idolatry and injustice that Yahweh would punish Judah. This suggests that pillars were as objectionable as any idol, image or asherah. Idols, images and even asherim

⁹³ The Hebrew Beth-shemesh usually refers to a place name in Palestine (so NEB here), but here it probably refers to a locality in Egypt. The LXX translates it as 'Heliopolis', but the normal OT name for this was On (Gen 41:5). This was an important cult centre from ancient times, and the Egyptian Obelisk, originally a symbol of the sun-god Atum Re, originated here. Jeremiah was probably referring to the sun worship in the 'temple of the sun' at Tahpanes where he was preaching to the exiles. Holladay (1989: 302).

⁹⁴ Jer 10:2-15; 16:18; 51:17-18,47,52; cf. 50:2.

⁹⁵ Manor (1993: 602).

⁹⁶ Zimmerli (1983: 36,37).

⁹⁷ Ezek 6:3-6,9,13; 8:3-18; 14:3-11 cf. 18:6,12,15; 20:7,16,18,24,31,39.

⁹⁸ Sorceries and soothsayers form part of the abominable practices prevalent in Canaan but condemned by the law. For a full list, see Deut 18:10-11; Lev 19:26.

⁹⁹ The basic tenet of Yahwism is the prohibition of graven images (פֶּסֶל) and every form of idol: Ex 20:4; Deut 5:8; 7:5,25.

¹⁰⁰ Some of the biblical texts suggest that the cult object of the goddess Asherah was a graven image, פֶּסֶל, or an image of an idol (2 Ki 21:7 cf. 1 Ki 15:13; 2 Chr 33:7,15) which was usually made (1 Ki 14:15; 16:33; 2 Ki 17:16; 21:3; 2 Chr 33:3). But other texts suggest that it was a stylised tree probably made of wood (Deut 16:21; Judg 6:26), which could be hewed down (Deut 14:3; 31:1), cut down (Ex 34:13; Judg 6:25-30; 2 Ki 18:4; 23:14), rooted out (Mic 5:14), pulled down (2 Chr 34:7), or burned (Deut 12:3; Judg 6:26; 2 Ki 23:6,15). Deut 16:21 suggests that it was a natural tree. So Lemaire (1977: 604-607); cf. Day (1992: 486). Others think that Asherah could be a stylised tree driven into the ground as it also appears on a clay model of a cultic scene from Cyprus. So de Moor (1974: 438-44); Day (1992: 486).

certainly represented specific deities in the Canaanite cult and they must have had similar functions in the Israelite cult condemned by the prophets, but it is unclear whether a pillar represented Yahweh or simply marked the sacred area as did many such pillars discovered by archaeology.

It appears so far that, except by Micah, pillars were not particularly objectionable in Yahweh's cult during the premonarchic and monarchic periods until the time of the Deuteronomists. In fact there is no mention of them as cult objects, either positive or negative, in Joshua, Judges and Samuel, and there is no direct condemnation of them in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Micah, however, condemns them along with other symbols of pagan worship.

It is probable from the foregoing discussion that מצבות as cultic symbols marking the sacred area, or possibly representing Yahweh, attracted no negative comment in the cults of Israel and Judah throughout their national existence, nor were they judged improper by the Deuteronomists either in Israel, except during the reigns of Ahab's son Jehoram and Jehu (2 Ki 3:2; 10:18-27), or in Judah, except during the reigns of Hezekiah (2 Ki 18:4, cf. 2 Chr 31:1) and Josiah (2 Ki 23:14).¹⁰¹ According to the Chronicler, Asa removed the pillars along with other pagan cult objects (2 Chr 14:3-5). According to the Deuteronomists, however, the asherim were more objectionable cult symbols than the pillars, but the 'high places' were still objectionable,¹⁰² since the Deuteronomists considered the actions of good kings of Judah in removing the pagan cult symbols to be qualified by allowing the high places to continue.¹⁰³ The high places were found throughout the land and here people carried on Yahweh worship using various pagan cultic symbols. They were condemned not only because of their pagan associations but more importantly because they came directly in conflict with the Deuteronomists' scheme of centralisation of worship at Jerusalem. The Deuteronomists add that it was in fact such idolatry that brought the final destruction on the northern kingdom (2 Ki 17:7-18).

The prohibition of מצבות in the Torah occurs in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy.¹⁰⁴ The background was Israel's settlement in the land of Canaan, where the idolatrous Canaanite cult was also represented by local gods (אלהים), idols (אלילים), graven images (פסלים), figured stones (אבן משכית), asherim (אשרים), and altars (מזבחות). Among

¹⁰¹ Cf. Alberty (1994: 65,173).

¹⁰² The phrase 'high place(s)' comes from the Hebrew במה/במה, used 103 times in the Bible. The Hebrew word is interpreted variously as: part of the body, 'back', 'ridge'; a place, 'high ground', 'mound'; or a 'cult centre'. But the most common usage of this word is for a 'cult place', (about 80 times). The precise meaning, architecture and function of a 'bamah', however, is a subject of considerable dispute among scholars. Albright (1957b: 242-58) held that 'bamah' represented a funerary stele, but this view has been rejected. It is probably a cult-house with or without a raised platform. Cf. Vaughan (1974); Barrick (1975: 565-95; 1992: 196-200); Witney (1979: 125-147). Fowler (1982b: 203-13) commits himself to no interpretation.

¹⁰³ E.g. 1 Ki 15:14; 22:43; 2 Ki 12:3; 14:4; 15:4, 35. However, the Chronicler disagrees, 2 Chr 14:3-5; 17:6.

¹⁰⁴ Ex 23:24; 34:13; Lev 26:1; Deut 7:5; 12:3; 16:21-22.

these, the only cultic symbol common to both pagan and approved Israelite worship was the altar, but the Canaanite altars were condemned in the law. Why were the Canaanite altars condemned? How were they distinguished from Israelite altars? It is probably that they were always associated with other cult symbols just mentioned. Altars per se were not condemned, but they formed part of the total cultic system that was against Yahwistic worship. The pillars probably did not bear any image, nor represented any idol in the Canaanite/Israelite cult, but simply stood next to the altar marking the sacred area, just as the cultic *מצבות* recovered archaeologically.¹⁰⁵ Thus a pillar standing next to the altar in Yahweh worship was probably viewed as innocent, since it did not represent a deity or idol. Therefore the command to tear down their altars, break their pillars, burn/hew down their asherim and burn/hew down their graven images may be a general condemnation of the Canaanite cult in totality, without a specific focus on pillars. Thus the pentateuchal traditions, despite their variable dating,¹⁰⁶ are not to be viewed as concerned with specific prohibitions about pillars. Nevertheless, it may be pointed out that the tolerance of *מצבות* in the earlier traditions does not necessarily prove their approval in Israelite worship. The Deuteronomic reform was triggered primarily by the discovery of the 'book of the law', suggesting that the people and even the clergy were generally ignorant of the demands of the law. Therefore it is not unreasonable to think that these prohibitions about Canaanite cult in Exodus had remained unnoticed and unimplemented earlier.

Thus the *מצבות* in general were viewed positively in the Israelite cult, or at least not condemned, except by the Deuteronomic reformers and certain prophets who condemned the Canaanite cult as a whole in which *מצבות* formed a part. The asherim, idols and high places, however, were special targets of their condemnation as illegitimate in Yahweh's cult, but the pillars were more neutral than other symbols.

What about the pillars in the patriarchal narratives? Were they viewed as innocent, simply marking the sacred area, or did they represent deities? What did the authors think of them?

4.4. *מצבות* in the patriarchal narratives

Our study so far suggests that *baetyls*, 'sacred stones' and pillars are different entities, though a degree of overlap in meaning and function may be admitted. Jacob's stone erected at Bethel may belong to the last of these categories. Jacob erects pillars on

¹⁰⁵ Mettinger (1995: 143ff.).

¹⁰⁶ For the dating of Ex 23:24; 34:13, see Driver (1911: 202); Noth (1961: 192,93,262); Childs (1974: 452-61,613).

two occasions in Genesis.¹⁰⁷ The מצבה in Gen 28:22 was called בית אלהים, while Jacob's actions directed to the מצבות in 28:18 and 35:14 included anointing them with oil and pouring a drink offering over one, actions not attested elsewhere in the Bible. Jacob's expression together with his actions suggest that the מצבות he erected were more than mere cultic stones marking sacred precincts. While Jacob's actions are not condemned, the context in both instances suggests that they were part of his response to the theophanies that preceded them. Several scholars, however, see a connection between stone and god, and suggest that Jacob worshipped the god who dwelt in the stone. We need to examine the Bethel stories, especially Gen 28:10-22 and 35:9-15, in their immediate and broader context of the Jacob-cycle in order to understand both the nature of the pillars and the religion of the patriarch.

4.4.1. Place of Genesis 28:10-22 in the Jacob cycle

From Gunkel to von Rad, scholars have largely followed the traditional source division of the Jacob cycle (Gen 25-36), and explained it as having developed in several stages. There is no consensus, however, about the origin of the first Bethel story within the Jacob cycle. While for Gunkel this was one of the latest layers,¹⁰⁸ for Noth Jacob's association with the sanctuaries of Shechem and Bethel belongs to the earlier strata of the tradition.¹⁰⁹ For Eissfeldt the Bethel story does not play any significant role in the formation of the Jacob cycle.¹¹⁰

In recent times, however, several scholars have given special attention to Gen 28:10-22 as having a central place in the formation of the whole Jacob cycle. First, Richter sees the 'vow' in 28:10-22 as the theological framework of the Jacob tradition. He argues that the vow was connected with other texts in the Jacob cycle: 31:5, gives the partial fulfilment of the vow of Gen 28:20b, 31:13 finds its parallel in Gen 28:21b, and 35:3 is linked similarly with 28:20a. Even the geographical framework, the departure from and the return to Bethel, is dependent on the vow. The Elohist saw the importance of different elements for the needs of his audience, and thus brought them together in the Jacob tradition in a theologically contrived scheme.¹¹¹ Secondly, de Pury regards the Jacob cycle as a coherent and unified narrative, and the theophany at Bethel with its promise and vow as central to it.¹¹² Thirdly, Westermann regards the stories of theophany and cult places in

¹⁰⁷ Cf. note 46. מצבה occurs eleven times in Genesis alone, all in the Jacob cycle. While the מצבות in Gen 31:45,51,52[x2] were legal stones, and the מצבה in 35:20[x2] was probably a memorial stone, the מצבות in 28:18,22; 31:13; 35:14[x2] were clearly cultic stones.

¹⁰⁸ Gunkel (1928: 156-67); cf. de Vaux (1978: 169ff.). For de Vaux the fourth layer is 'Jacob-Israel,' and from here onwards de Vaux follows Eissfeldt and Noth.

¹⁰⁹ Noth (1972: 55ff., 79-101).

¹¹⁰ Eissfeldt (1962b: 369,370).

¹¹¹ Richter (1967: 50,52).

¹¹² De Pury (1975: 32ff.).

the Jacob cycle as originally independent but inserted later with a definite plan. The content of Gen 28:10-22 and 32:1-2 had an important function in the composition of the Jacob cycle, in that it brought to the fore the theological aspect of the Jacob-Esau story.¹¹³ Westermann is right if the theological aspect was the chief concern of the author. However, for Westermann the genealogies and the itineraries, not the stories of theophany and cult places, formed the framework of Gen 26-36. Fourthly, Blum considered 28:10-22 as part of the core of the Jacob tradition since it narrates the founding of the cult place. This story, Blum argued, was combined by the vow (28:20-22) and the theme of fraternal reconciliation with the other core part of the Jacob tradition, namely the Jacob-Esau-Laban story, which had its own independent evolution out of smaller units. The Bethel story was built into the broader context of the Jacob cycle by the itinerary note (v. 10), the divine speech (vv. 13a-15) and the vow (vv. 20-22).¹¹⁴

While some source critics incline towards the idea of a possible coherence in the overall Jacob-cycle on account of the Bethel story contained in it, several narrative critics, for different reasons, argue that the Jacob cycle is essentially a coherent unit on its own, and is incomplete without its broader context, viz. the book of Genesis, and the book of Genesis in turn has its own context, the Hexateuch.¹¹⁵ It is clear from the foregoing discussion that there is no consensus as to whether the Bethel story was originally part of the larger Jacob-cycle. It is safer to interpret the story from the final author's view point than to read the text from a hypothetical reconstruction of the story. So what about the Bethel story - is it a coherent unit within itself?

4.4.2. Composition of Gen 28:10-22

There is a wide diversity of opinion among scholars as to the exact assignment of each verse to individual sources.¹¹⁶ Most critics assign the text mainly to E (vv. 11,12,17,18,20-22, the dream proper and the vow), with some Yahwistic insertions (vv. 10,13-16,19) and some notes by an unknown redactor.¹¹⁷ But this is strongly opposed by Westermann and Blum.

Westermann sees the main narrative in vv. 10-12 and 16-19 as essentially a unity, with only v. 15, inserted by J, and vv. 13-14, 20-22 as later expansions. He argues that the divine designations, traditionally used to assign the text to different sources, are not required in the context. Elohim 'occurs only in the expansions (vv. 20-22) and in two

¹¹³ Westermann (1985: 408).

¹¹⁴ Blum (1984: 202-203, cf. 34-35).

¹¹⁵ Fokkelman (1975: 46-241); cf. Fishbane (1975: 15-38); Gammie (1979: 117-34).

¹¹⁶ De Pury (1975:33-35) conveniently summarises the different analyses of 22 scholars. Westermann and Blum may be further added to his list. Only significant deviations which seriously affect the interpretation will be treated here.

¹¹⁷ Skinner (1930: 376); cf. Driver (1948: 264). Contrast Coats (1983: 208), who regards this unit as part of the Yahwistic narrative expanded at points by the Elohist.

contexts, vv. 12,17, where its use is conditioned by the material.’¹¹⁸ The story developed in three stages: it was originally a ‘sanctuary narrative’ (vv. 10-12, 16-19) about the origin of a holy place, narrated and preserved at the sanctuary. In the second stage, J took over this existing story and introduced (with v. 15) the context of Jacob who discovered the holy place. To the third stage belong the later expansions (vv. 13b,14 and 20-22), in which the two most important aspects of Israel's sedentary life in Canaan are reflected, namely the promise of land and descendants and the cultic practice of tithes and vows. He concludes: ‘the formation of 28:10-22 can be reduced to a few strands in these three stages which correspond to the three stages of the formation of the patriarchal stories in the context of the formation of the people of Israel. Hence there is no place for complicated and hypothetical constructions (e.g. those of A. de Pury and O.H. Steck).’¹¹⁹

Westermann's proposals appear plausible, but certain points in his theory remain unclear. He assumes on the basis of excavations that there was a sanctuary at Bethel with its aetiology long before the emergence of the Israelites in Canaan. There is extra-biblical evidence for the former but not for the latter. Westermann says that the *old story* contained only the dream (v. 12), but he seems to assume that the story around the dream (vv. 10, 11,16-19) was part of the original story. In any case he argues that this whole is a unity. It is hardly plausible that only the dream (v. 12) was narrated and transmitted at the sanctuary. In this case, the name of Jacob (or someone who erected the stone) must be part of the original story as well as the stone he erected, since they are contained in vv. 10 and 18. Westermann does say, however, that the Yahwist introduced the context of Jacob at v. 15,¹²⁰ but he is not clear whether the story of the erection of the pillar originated with the Yahwist or was part of the old story.¹²¹

Blum, while sympathetic towards the synchronic analysis of Fokkelman and others, rejects source analysis of the passage and argues that Gen 28:10-22 is an independent and self-contained unit.¹²² He thinks that vv. 11-13aα, and 16-19 are an independent statement of the foundation of the cult by Jacob, the eponymous father of the nation.¹²³ This was the first building-block in the history of Jacob's tradition, and was built into the greater narrative context of the Jacob-cycle by the itinerary note in v. 10, the speech of God in vv. 13-15 and the oath of Jacob in vv. 20-22.

Thus, while the consensus of literary criticism attributes the dream, *maṣṣēbāh* and vow to the same source (E), some recent scholars reduce the original story to the dream

¹¹⁸ Westermann (1985: 453,456,458).

¹¹⁹ Westermann (1985: 452-53).

¹²⁰ A little later in his exposition of vv. 16-18, Westermann says that ‘it is possible that v. 16 is an addition by J and belongs more closely with v. 15 abβ’ (456).

¹²¹ Several scholars regard vv. 20-22 as an appendage, since they think these verses have no connection whatsoever with the preceding verses, e.g. Richter (1967: 43-52); Otto (1976: 174); cf. Westermann (1985: 458).

¹²² Blum (1984: 25).

¹²³ Blum (1984: 28-29).

alone. A number of scholars, despite their varied methods, assume that the story of Jacob's dream is much older than J or E. It is not certain, however, whether this story had an antecedent in Canaanite traditions prior to its incorporation into its present context. This lacks firm evidence, and can only be presupposed in the light of the tradition history of the shrine at Bethel. What is certain is that the story in its present context reflects the perspective of the Yahwist, or of the redactor with a conscious dissociation of the previous Canaanite background of the place. Any interpretation of מצבה in this passage has to take these observations into consideration.

4.4.3. Analysis of Genesis 28:10-22

In the light of the above observations, dividing the passage according to source analysis is not satisfactory. Leaving the expansions (vv. 13-15,20) aside, it is possible to consider vv. 11-12 and 16-19 as belonging to the old story of Jacob's dream. The final form of vv. 11 and 16 may still be assigned to the final redactor, who deliberately describes the place as obscure, Jacob's stopover as unplanned (due to the impossibility of travel after sunset), and the stone Jacob took as ordinary.¹²⁴ Such conscious dissociation of any prior sacredness of the site is further reflected in Jacob's total surprise at the theophany (v. 16). The use of יהוה in Jacob's speech is another indication that the final form of v. 16 comes from a redactor, since we know from elsewhere (Ex 6:3) that the patriarchs did not know God by this name. Thus we are left with vv. 12,17,18 and 19a as the core story of Jacob's dream and his response. Jacob's actions towards the stone are to be explained within the context of these verses.

Jacob's reaction to his dream was four-fold. First, Jacob expressed surprise at the theophany. This was unprecedented since neither Abraham nor Isaac reacted in this manner.¹²⁵ Jacob's words, 'this is none other than בית אלהים' refer not to the stone but to 'the place' where God had manifested his presence to Jacob.¹²⁶ Similarly, the expression 'this is the gate of heaven' refers to the place where angels ascended and descended, or to 'something analogous to the stairway in the dream.'¹²⁷ The notion that such a gateway existed between heaven and earth was widespread in Babylon, where ziggurats were supposed to connect the earthly shrine with the heavenly sanctuary by their ladder or stairway. In Egypt it was thought that the souls of the dead reach up to the gate of heaven

¹²⁴ *Contra* Gunkel (1902: 280) and Burrows (1934: 45) who consider the stone as so unusually large that only Jacob, being giant-like, could erect. Donner (1962: 68-70), Frazer (1969: 191) and Houtman (1977: 345) consider it a *baetyl* or holy stone. Contrast Dalglish (1992:709), for whom the stone used as headrest was commensurate with its purpose. To use a stone as pillow seems to be common among the Arabs living in this area even today. Kelso (1968: 46).

¹²⁵ Sarna (1989: 199); *pace* Westermann (1985: 457).

¹²⁶ Westermann (1985: 457); Sarna (1989: 199 cf. 398).

¹²⁷ Westermann (1985: 457).

by means of a ladder.¹²⁸ But it is doubtful if the author of Genesis had these views in mind, though it is possible that he was aware of them. It is unlikely that the place where Jacob passed the night was the traditional Canaanite shrine. As Sarna notes:

Superficially, the episode recalls the phenomenon of incubation. It was customary throughout the ancient world, both Near Eastern and classical, for a devotee to sleep in the sacred precincts of a temple in order to induce the deity to reveal its will. However, the present narrative emphatically dissociates Jacob's experience from this pagan practice by stressing the wholly unplanned nature of his stopover, the complete anonymity of "the place," and the total unexpectedness of the theophany.¹²⁹

Keret's camping at a shrine before his campaign for his wife was such an instance.¹³⁰ Although Jacob's situation may be compared to Keret's, the author implicitly denies that Jacob's camping was at the Canaanite shrine. Excavations at Burg Beitin have revealed the existence of an open-air shrine there from 3500 BC, a temple from the 19th century BC, a stone pillar *in situ* from MBI and II,¹³¹ and the probability that the settlement of Luz and the shrine of Bethel occupied the same site.¹³² Verse 19 implies that the place of Jacob's theophany lay near Luz,¹³³ and the name Bethel which Jacob gave to the place probably extended later to the settlement Luz.¹³⁴

Secondly, Jacob erected a מצבה, unlike Abraham and Isaac who built altars in response to a theophany. It is not clear why Abraham and Isaac were not portrayed as erecting pillars. But it is incorrect to argue that 'the need felt for such signs of the Divine presence belonged ... to a later stage of the religious development',¹³⁵ since stone worship was one of the oldest practices in the history of religion, and it is impossible that Abraham or Isaac were unaware of these practices. Further, it is not certain whether the story in its original form was about the worship of a numen resident in the stone.¹³⁶ If the author consciously denied the Canaanite association of 'the place', why would he leave any traces of a belief that could be misunderstood later by his readers? The author obviously stood in the tradition that viewed pillars positively, and not as abodes of a numen. We have no way of knowing exactly what the stone would have meant to Jacob, but what the author thought it meant is reasonably clear. It was a 'sign' of Jacob's dream and a 'witness' to his vow.¹³⁷ In the light of other occurrences of מצבות in the OT and of archaeological

¹²⁸ De Vaux (1961: 291); cf. Driver (1948: 377-78); Speiser (1964: 219-20); Sarna (1989: 199).

¹²⁹ Sarna (1989: 197-98).

¹³⁰ ANET (149).

¹³¹ Kelso (1968: 20,21,45,46, cf. 1-3).

¹³² Kallai (1986: 130-31); *contra* Westermann (1985: 458).

¹³³ Dillmann (1897: 229); Haran (1978: 52).

¹³⁴ It is probable that the Israelites took over the pagan shrine during the time of Joshua (Jos 18:21) or the judges (Judg 1:22,26) since Bethel became an important cult centre from then on, especially in the eighth century.

¹³⁵ Dillmann (1897: 227-28).

¹³⁶ So Holzinger (1898: 193); Gunkel (1902: 281-82); Procksch (1924: 340-42); Smith (1927: 204,205); Westermann (1985: 454).

¹³⁷ Sarna (1989: 199).

discovery, the stone could also be a marker of a sacred place.¹³⁸ Such a meaning is quite fitting given Jacob's awe and surprise following his dream. The meaning of the stone is further elucidated by Jacob's subsequent action. This leads us to the third point.

Thirdly, Jacob anointed the מצבה. If מצבות were unique to the Jacob stories in the patriarchal narratives, their anointing is unique to the whole OT. Altars were only anointed for consecration or dedication.¹³⁹ Various cultic objects were 'consecrated' by means of anointing for the purpose of cultic use.¹⁴⁰ Thus several scholars think that a 'consecration' was meant in Jacob's anointing of the stone.¹⁴¹ On the other hand, various types of people, namely leaders, kings and priests, were anointed with oil, especially when taking office. Such anointing is variously interpreted: as 'sacral', bringing a special relationship between the anointed and God; as 'secular', indicating the community's authorisation; or as a combination of both.¹⁴² However, it is unlikely that Jacob established a special relationship between the stone and God by anointing it. Individuals were anointed for their position either by divine sanction or by popular acclaim, but Jacob had neither. It is possible that Jacob's anointing separated the stone from the common realm and made it a cult-object just as the high priest was set apart for cultic duties by his anointing,¹⁴³ or that the stone became a representative of god as in the anointing^{of} leaders and kings. Even this is not certain. While anointing certainly does not refer to offering sacrifices to the indwelling numen,¹⁴⁴ it is uncertain whether it conveys power to the object.¹⁴⁵

There is, however, widespread evidence among the ancient Semites of the use of oil as a symbol of peace, friendship and fellowship. Anointing was practised in effecting relationships, transacting business, buying and selling land, contracting marriage and international treaties, and liberating slaves. Anointing by a weaker party signified an obligation.¹⁴⁶ Thus Jacob's anointing was probably a symbolic act of establishing a contractual bond with God, as Mettinger proposes:

the events at Bethel provide a contractual setting for Jacob's anointing of the stone ... And that *māššebā* can have a function in a contractual setting appears from Gn 31,45. There is thus reason to conclude that the efficacy of the anointing performed by Jacob was not primarily a sanctification or a consecration of the stone, but was to establish a contractual relation between Jacob and God.¹⁴⁷

¹³⁸ Graesser (1972: 45,46).

¹³⁹ Ex 29:36; Lev 8:11; Num 7:1,10.

¹⁴⁰ Ex 30:22-29; 40:9-11; Lev 8:10-11; Num 7:1; Hos 12:2 (here oil is used probably in an international treaty).

¹⁴¹ Driver (1948: 266); Pedersen (1940: 209); von Rad (1965: 280-81); Kidner (1967: 159).

¹⁴² For a detailed survey of OT passages and views of different scholars, see Mettinger (1976: 185-94).

¹⁴³ Kutsch (1963: 26-27); cf. Blum (1984: 268). Incidentally, Kutsch's view presupposes that the stone was of common origin prior to its anointing.

¹⁴⁴ *Contra* Holzinger (1898: 193); Skinner (1930: 380).

¹⁴⁵ *Pace* Bertholet (1930: 226); cf. Westermann (1985: 458).

¹⁴⁶ Mettinger (1976: 211-24), cites various texts of the ANE in which oil was used to effectuate a relationship.

¹⁴⁷ Mettinger (1976: 224-25); cf. Sarna (1989: 200). However, Mettinger seems to have changed his views about Jacob's pillar, since he identifies it with *baetyl*, (1995: 140-41).

Many commentators have been misled by the view that stone worship lay behind Jacob's מצבה. But firm evidence is lacking, and the parallels proposed (e.g. Pausanias's description of the stone at Delphi, and the *baetylia* of Philo Byblos) are too remote and the religious views attached to them too different to be comparable.

Fourthly, Jacob makes a vow. As noted above, vv. 20-22 have been generally considered later expansions. The main problems are that these verses have no syntactical link with the main narrative, the oath is a literary construction and not a reproduction of the oath pronounced by Jacob, and there is verbal contradiction between 'it is none other than the house of God!' (v. 17) and 'this stone shall be a house of God' (v. 22).¹⁴⁸ It will be argued in chapter 6 that Richter's contention that Jacob's vow is a literary construction of the Elohist is untenable. It will suffice here to state the conclusions we reach there. It is unclear whether the author recorded Jacob's vow verbatim. The many parallels both in the Bible and the ANE with similar if not identical form suggest that vow making is a universal religious phenomenon, usually occurring in the context of prayer when the individual or community is in trouble.¹⁴⁹ The similarity of form and structure may suggest a certain amount of standardisation in the literary preservation of the vows, but this does not prove that a vow like Jacob's could not have been made. On the other hand, if the anointing of the stone belongs to the context of Jacob, it is not improbable to suppose that the oath in v. 22 is a pronouncement of the obligation implied in that anointing. Further, it fits well with Jacob's modest requests and his situation described between his flight and return.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, it is more reasonable to suppose that the oath was part of the episode than that it was a creation of the author.

Finally, Jacob's words, 'this is none other than the house of God', are clearly in parallelism with the following sentence, 'and this is the gate of heaven'. Together they refer to the place and its dangerous link with the divine, not to a physical building. Theophanies in the Bible took place both at sanctuaries and in the open field. Thus Gideon and Manoah made offerings where God appeared to them. Further, if the author is consciously dissociating Jacob's stay from any established cult place, it is unlikely that he imagined that there was a cult place. So the above two phrases may be taken with the previous two phrases, 'surely Yahweh is in this place' and 'how awesome is this place?', to refer to 'the place' in relation to Jacob's experience of the dream. It is not necessary to envisage a literal building, since 'the house of God' could refer to the place of theophany. However, the last sentence, 'and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house,' could refer to a physical building. It cannot mean that the מצבה would become an abode of God, as Westermann observes: 'This is impossible not only because of v. 17 but also because of

¹⁴⁸ Richter (1967: 44,45,50); cf. Westermann (1985: 458).

¹⁴⁹ E.g. the vows of Israel (Num 21:2); Jephthah (Judg 11:30-31), Hannah (1 Sam 1:11) and Absalom (2 Sam 15:8). Cf. Keret's vow in ANET (145).

¹⁵⁰ Cf. de Pury (1975: 435-38).

v. 21b. It can only mean a sanctuary is to arise from this stone, or the stone is to be extended into a sanctuary...'¹⁵¹ If we are right in this interpretation, it further strengthens our contention that for the final author there was no shrine already existing at the place of Jacob's dream.

Therefore it is not possible to conclude that Jacob's stone was a *baetyl*, although etymologically and religio-historically *baetyl* and Bethel (as deity) are certainly related. Stone as an abode of deity is one of the oldest human beliefs, but this is impossible to read as the view of the author of the Bethel story. Whether Jacob had such a view is uncertain. On the other hand it is probable that the rite performed in relation to the stone was an ancient custom performed to establish a contractual bond between God and Jacob.

4.4.4. Genesis 35:9-15 and its relation to 28:10-22

Most scholars ascribe Gen 35:9-15 to P but consider v. 14, which describes Jacob's setting up of the pillar, as extraneous, since it disturbs the unity of the passage. Opinion is so varied with regard to the origin and place of Gen 35:14 in its present context that we are inclined to think that there are no valid controls over the different approaches followed by scholars. While some assign it to E, along with vv. 1-5 and 6b-8,¹⁵² others regard it as parallel to 28:18 and attribute it to J.¹⁵³ Procksch, von Rad and Westermann, however, assign v. 14 to a redactor who inserted it in P. Von Rad thinks that neither is it related to 28:20ff. nor did it originally belong to Jacob stories, while Westermann thinks it was originally an itinerary report available to a redactor who 'adapted it to his context by the double reference to the preceding revelation'.¹⁵⁴ For de Pury v. 14 fits the context of P but does not come from it, since P rejects all idea of cultic worship in the patriarchal epoch. Nor can it be from E, since it is separated from E's context by v. 8. Therefore it was added by a redactor.¹⁵⁵ By contrast, Blum finds no sufficient reason to excise v. 14 from the context of vv. 9-15, which for him is a unity. 'The narrator of 35:9-15 deliberately described the Bethel episode freshly in a revised version, emptying all its etiological content. Out of the sacred place, the dwelling of God becomes the place of a unique word of revelation, and the sacred stone becomes the memorial stone.'¹⁵⁶

It is clear from the context that vv. 14 and 15 belong together, since both describe a direct result of the theophany in vv. 9-13.¹⁵⁷ So there is no reason for separating v. 15

¹⁵¹ Westermann (1985: 459); cf. Driver (1948: 267). *Contra* Skinner (1930: 379).

¹⁵² Gunkel (1902: 335); so also Skinner (1930: 423).

¹⁵³ Driver (1948: 310).

¹⁵⁴ Westermann (1985: 553-54); cf. Procksch (1924: 382); von Rad (1961: 332-33).

¹⁵⁵ De Pury (1975: 546ff., 553-59).

¹⁵⁶ Blum (1984: 268-69).

¹⁵⁷ Westermann (1985: 554).

from v. 14 and ascribing it to P, as is usually done.¹⁵⁸ Thus it is plausible to consider, along with Blum, that vv. 9-15 are an independent unit incorporated into Jacob's story by the final redactor, who wanted to show that Jacob erected the pillar a second time in response to a fresh revelation. Thus עֹד, 'again', in 35:9 is not a gloss, as Westermann explains: 'rather R wants to state expressly that the revelation made to Jacob "when he was fleeing from his brother" (vv. 1,7) has its counterpart at the very place ("when he came from Paddan-aram") where he fulfils the vow then made.'¹⁵⁹

As for the content, there are some similarities between Gen 28:10-22 and this section, in that they both start with a theophany, proceed to give a revelatory address, and finally describe Jacob's reaction in setting up a מַצְבֵּה and naming the place. The differences, however, are also significant. First, the theophany was undramatic, with no ladder or angels, and occasioned no surprise as at the first instance. Jacob's surprise confirms our earlier contention that Bethel was not a holy place before he had his first experience there. This time, however, it is impossible that Jacob did not expect a theophany, both because of his previous experience, and much more because it was the same God who led him back to the same place in order that he might worship him. Secondly, while the promise of land and increase are repeated, the promise of presence, protection and returning are omitted because these have been fulfilled by Jacob's safe return. However, the naming, or rather renaming of Jacob is something new in this episode. It does ^{not} appear to cohere with the story,¹⁶⁰ but it is possible that the author wants to show that the unknown wrestler who first gave him this name in 32:28 is none other than El Shaddai, the familiar God of his fathers. This is probably a reminder to Jacob that he was dealing with the same God. Thirdly, there is the addition of the drink offering here compared to the mere anointing in the former episode. Blum's view that, despite the addition of the ritual of a drink offering, the place and the מַצְבֵּה have been totally emptied of any sacredness,¹⁶¹ is probably an overstatement. It is probable, as Blum points out, that the words 'then God went up from him at the place where he had spoken with him' (v 13) are a virtual negation of what is said about the place in 28:16,17. The explanatory apposition אֵבֶן (מַצְבֵּה) precludes any understanding of מַצְבֵּה as a technical term for a cult-stone.¹⁶² It is, however, improbable that the story of Gen 28:10ff. holds the place as sacred, since the focus was on the theophany and the response of Jacob who felt that the place was 'awesome'. It is possible that for the author the place derived its sanctity from the experience of the patriarchs, but for Jacob the place was like any other place. However,

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Holzinger (1898: 184); Driver (1948: 310) regards v. 15 as P's parallel to 28:19 in J; so also Speiser (1964: 271). Contrast Westermann (1985: 553).

¹⁵⁹ Westermann (1985: 553).

¹⁶⁰ So Blum (1984: 267).

¹⁶¹ Blum (1984: 269).

¹⁶² Blum (1984: 268); cf. Dillmann (1897: 306-7); Procksch (1924: 382).

the fact that Jacob not only anointed the מצבה but also offered libation to it suggests that Jacob viewed the stone as more than a mere memorial.

One can understand the anointing of the stone from its previous occurrence in 28:18, but the problematic drink offering which Jacob poured on the pillar is variously interpreted. We have rejected the idea that it was an offering to the dead.¹⁶³ Some scholars have related v. 14 to 35:8, and regard the מצבה of v. 14 as a grave stone and the libation as an offering to the dead,¹⁶⁴ but Westermann rightly notes that this is 'possible only if the reason given for setting up the pillar in v. 14 is deleted.'¹⁶⁵ Blum thinks that ויצק עליה שמן is not borrowed from Gen 28:18 but is to be interpreted by the preceding ויסך עליה נסך, since there is nothing about the consecration of the pillar, but about a unique libation offering which would be clearly understood here as a response to the appearance of God.¹⁶⁶ The word נסך, used only here in Genesis, usually means a drink offering offered both in legitimate and illegitimate cult. It is usually offered on the altar and almost invariably to a deity.¹⁶⁷ But here it is poured on the pillar, not on an altar. An inscription of Sennacherib's (704-681 BC) mentions anointing and pouring a libation on a pillar that was to be reinstated, but Sennacherib had his name inscribed on it, and stated, that he who found it should do the anointing and offering (libation) before reinstating it,¹⁶⁸ whereas in Jacob's story the actions followed the setting up. It is not certain, however, whether Jacob was 'rehabilitating the original stela ... now invested with new meaning.'¹⁶⁹ The words, 'when he came from Paddan-aram', indicate that the whole tradition of vv. 9ff. was new for the author, so for him Jacob erected a stele afresh at the same place or thereabouts. It is possible that the author knew the Bethel story in Gen 28, but he probably assumed that the pillar Jacob had erected some 20 years previously no longer stood there. The pouring of oil on the pillar most probably reflects the same rite as in 28:18 and has the same significance, that is to establish once again a contractual bond between God and Jacob. The drink offering was possibly intended to commemorate God's appearance to Jacob, or more probably offered to God himself, since the text appears to point out that Jacob had localised the God who spoke to him to the place by means of a pillar, and by pouring a libation to it he had thought that it was received by God. This incident probably belonged to the original Jacob stories that the redactor was compelled to include here because it was impossible for the redactor, who was consciously emptying any sanctity of the place or the stone previously, to add a tradition with an extra ritual of drink offering which would give an

¹⁶³ See 2.4.4. above.

¹⁶⁴ Gunkel (1902: 337); Skinner (1930: 424).

¹⁶⁵ Westermann (1985: 553).

¹⁶⁶ Blum (1984: 269).

¹⁶⁷ Ex 29:40; 2 Ki 16:13; Isa 57:6 (offered to smooth stones of the valley); Jer 7:18; 19:13; 44:18,19,25; Ezek 20:28; Hos 9:4.

¹⁶⁸ Luckenbill (1924: 130).

¹⁶⁹ Sarna (1989: 242).

impression of a Canaanite practice of his own time. The phrase 'the place where he spoke with him', called clumsy and redundant by most exegetes, is probably the remainder of the received tradition. Further, the redactor wants us to know that Jacob resumed his journey from Bethel after this event (in v. 16). In the light of these observations, therefore, the pillar was a cultic מצבה which not only marked the sacred area of the theophany but also enabled Jacob to renew his contract and worship God by a drink offering.

4.5. Conclusion

Our investigation into *baetylia*, 'sacred stones' and *maṣṣēbāh* suggests that these were three different entities at their origin, and that the ideas associated with each of them were different. The *baetylia* were animated stones which later came to be associated with the popular gods of the Greek pantheon. They had magical qualities and they gave oracles and helped those who consulted them. 'Sacred stones' were found in their natural setting and were regarded as inherently sacred. They were venerated, and regular worship and offerings were made to them. The Zeus-stone, the stone of Kaába, the Linga, the obelisk and the like, rank among these venerated sacred stones. *Maṣṣēbôth* were of various types. The cultic *maṣṣēbôth* resembled the 'sacred stones', in that they marked sacred precincts, were sometimes anointed, and in some cases even venerated, but they cannot be described as either *baetylia* or 'sacred stones'. The pillars of Jacob are certainly cultic מצבות which marked the sacred area where God appeared. The anointing of them implies the establishing of a contractual bond between Jacob and God, the libation offered in the second account indicates an offering directed to God, but there is no suggestion in either case that Jacob believed that the stone was indwelt by a numen or that he offered worship to it. Building altars and calling upon the name of Yahweh formed the pattern of worship for Abraham and Isaac, and raising pillars indicated similar intention for Jacob, while he also used altars for worship. Thus Jacob's pillars are cultic מצבות and are distinct both from *baetylia* and the popular sacred stones of the ANE.

Chapter 5

Tithes

5.1. Introduction

Having seen patriarchal pattern of worship in building altars, calling upon the name of Yahweh and raising pillars, we shall now explore patriarchal religious practices attested in the form of tithes, vows and purificatory rites. We hope to demonstrate that patriarchal religious practices, like patriarchal pattern of worship, are distinct from both the ancient Near Eastern and Israelite practices. We shall deal with the practice of tithes first, not only because it forms a link with the previous chapter where it appears in Jacob's vow when he raised a pillar at Bethel, but also because it appears in the Abraham's cycle when the latter offers a tithe of the booty he acquired in a battle.

It is generally recognised that tithing is a very ancient custom practised in many cultures of the ANE. Ancient Israel is no exception in this regard. There is, however, only scanty evidence about the practice both in the ANE and the Bible.¹ Nevertheless, unlike the texts of the ANE, Israel's traditions not only mention tithing but also give various elements of legislation on the practice, notably concerning sanctity, redemption or exchange and the consequences of lapses. Elaborate instructions are given in later Jewish writings, for instance the Talmud, on redemption and exchange of various items from which a tithe was required. This indicates that the tithe was given a significant place in the religious life of Judaism. The practice, however, occurs only twice in the patriarchal narratives: first, in a politico-religious context, Abraham gave a tithe of the booty to Melchizedek, the king of Salem, and secondly, in a purely religious context, Jacob vowed a tithe of everything to God. By these two instances the author wants to show that the patriarchs were familiar with the practice, although only in Jacob's case did it have clear religious implications. However, the text shows no concern that Abraham paid his tithe to a pagan king, or whether Jacob ever paid his promised tithes at all. Therefore in this chapter we shall first investigate the practice in the ANE, secondly examine its relevance to the religion of Israel portrayed in the Hebrew Bible, and finally compare both with the practice attested in the patriarchal narratives, in order to understand whether it had any religious implications for the patriarchs or the authors of the narratives.

¹ Jagersma (1981: 116). The technical word for 'tithe' מעשר, and the verb עשר together occur over forty times in the Hebrew Bible.

5.2. The tithe in the Ancient Near East

A helpful survey of the evidence on the practice of tithing in the ANE, particularly in Mesopotamia, has been given by Salonen.² Ancient Near Eastern evidence comes from the 21st to the 14th centuries BC, and again from the 6th to the 4th centuries BC. There is very little evidence on tithing attested between the 14th and the 6th centuries BC. Perhaps some of the biblical texts fill this gap. In this respect Mendelsohn argued from Alalakh and Ugaritic texts that the idea in 1 Sam 8:4-17 of taxing the 'tenth' from the general public was 'an authentic description of the semi-feudal Canaanite society as it existed prior to and during the time of Samuel and that its author could conceivably have been the prophet himself or a spokesman of the anti-monarchical movement of that period.'³ The extant sources of the ANE use four different expressions to designate tithes: *zag* (Sumerian), *ešrētu[m]* (Old Babylonian and Old Assyrian), *mšr* (Ugaritic, cf. Hebrew) and *ešrû* (Late Babylonian).⁴ The linguistic affinity between the Akkadian, Ugaritic and the Hebrew terms is so close that it is tempting to think that the practice of tithing in all these cultures was similar. For this reason it is imperative to examine the texts of the ANE to find what light they may throw on the biblical practice of tithing.

5.2.1. Sumerian sources

All the relevant Sumerian sources come from the dynasties of Ur III, Isin I and Larsa, dating from the 21st to the 18th centuries.⁵ The word used for tithe in these sources is *zag*. For the sake of convenience we shall discuss only a sample of reasonably datable texts from different dynasties. It will be evident from these texts that the practice of tithing was well-known as a religious tax required from almost everyone in early second millennium Sumer.

First, according to Salonen, the practice of tithing is attested in all four different reigns known in the Ur III dynasty. Two texts from the time of king Šulgi (early 21st century) state that a tithe was given to the god Nanna from animals like sheep and goats and objects like mill-stones.⁶ Similarly a text from the time of king Amarsuena (mid 21st century) deals with a presentation of a tenth from oil, timber, reed and aromatic substances to the temple of the goddess Ningal.⁷ The precise number/portion 'ten/tenth' out of

² Salonen (1972).

³ Mendelsohn (1956: 17-22). Gen 28:22 (E, eighth century BC) and Amos 4:4 (eighth/seventh century BC) also form a link between the two periods. The Elohists' story was probably from a much older period.

⁴ Salonen (1972: 9-10).

⁵ Cf. Langdon (1923a: 7,8) and Salonen (1972: 10,11) for alternative detailed dating.

⁶ Salonen (1972: 17).

⁷ Salonen (1972: 17).

hundreds and tens of animals, objects, oil and spices, and the particular name of the god to whom they were presented, indicate that the tithe was an obligatory tax paid to the temples.

Two texts from the time of the king Šusuena (late 21st century) also deal with the tithe. While one of them talks about a stolen tithe, '2 donkeys, tithe of Nanna, Šugul, the man from Urusagrig, has stolen (and this) has to be admitted/given extra', the other talks about tithing to Nanna and Ningal from precious stones and sea-merchandise that was kept in storehouses.⁸ These texts suggest either that tithes were pledged for payment at a future date or that the tithes paid were not used up immediately and were stored in a temple store. Hence their stealing becomes possible. Malachi (3:8,10), Nehemiah (10:38-39; 12:44; 13:5,12) and 2 Chronicles (31:5,6,12) talk about tithes being stored in storehouses at the temple in Jerusalem, and Deuteronomy (14:22-27) about commuting a tithe to the central sanctuary where it was to be enjoyed by the giver and his guests. The latter also implies an initial storing of tithes and the possibility of their being stolen. However, there is no record of tithes being stolen in the Hebrew Bible, though Malachi accused Israel of robbing God when they failed to pay their tithes.

Five texts from the time of the king Ibbisuen, also of Ur III (late 21st century) note the practice of tithing not only cattle and agricultural produce but also finished products such as garments. Interestingly, a tithe of figs from the garden of a 'wailing-priest' or 'cultic singer' also appears in these texts.⁹ Thus implicitly (if not explicitly) even the cult personnel paid tithes. It is also not clear if the kings themselves paid tithes. Certainly the tithes were directed to the gods, especially to Nanna and Ningal in the Ur III dynasty, suggesting that these were the patron gods of the dynasty. The clear mention of the 'tenth' suggests that it was an obligatory tax paid to temples. The restoration or extra payment for a stolen tithe indicates the seriousness of such a crime and the penalty incurred for it. On the other hand, there is no ideology of tithing to indicate whether it was a sign that what they possessed also belonged to the gods, or a gift in expectation of future blessing, or simply an obligation to the temple.

Secondly, the practice of ornament and sceptre tithing is attested in the First dynasty of Isin (late 20th to early 19th centuries). A sceptre tithe could be offered only by kings. There is clear reference to the king Ur-Nirurta who offered a tithe described as a 'sacred gift'.¹⁰ With this we have the total social spectrum of kings, priests(?) and commoners offering tithes. It is uncertain, however, whether the tithe was obligatory for the kings. The fact that it was described as a 'sacred gift' suggests that it had religious connotation, although it is unclear what this was. Biblical tithes were certainly considered 'holy' to Yahweh (Lev 27:32).

⁸ Salonen (1972: 17-18).

⁹ Salonen (1972: 18).

¹⁰ Salonen (1972: 18).

Thirdly, from the Sumerian dynasties of Larsa, the custom of tithing is attested from five different places and periods. A text from the time of the king Gungunum (late 20th century) states that a tithe from copper, ivory, corals, beads, silver and other precious stones was offered to Ningal.¹¹ Similarly, several texts from the time of king Abīsarē (from about the same period) and king Sumuel (early 19th century), state that a tithe from gold, silver, copper and precious stones was offered to Ningal following an 'expedition to Tilmun'.¹² The gold and precious stones suggest this was an expedition of war rather than business. We may recall here the biblical instances of tithing from an expedition by Abraham (Gen 14) and the Israelites (Num 31). If the biblical parallels are any guide, the Sumerian tithe following an expedition was probably a religious obligation. Tithes to the goddess Īstar are attested from Nūrudad and Rīmsīn (mid-19th to mid-18th centuries).¹³

5.2.2. Old Assyrian and Old Babylonian sources

Both *ešrātu* and *ešrētu* are used in these sources to describe the practice of tithing, and the idea was current in both religious and secular contexts.¹⁴ While one Old Assyrian text refers to the tithe imposed on garments as 'tax', another refers to the tenth of a business proceeds as 'share'.¹⁵ An Old Babylonian text, however, states that the god Šamaš demands the tithe from those who 'borrowed or vowed'.¹⁶ The payment of this tithe was linked to the barley harvest, suggesting that the tithe could have been annual or collected from every harvest. An early Babylonian letter from Larsa probably confirms the idea of an annual tithe: 'On account of the dues(?) for this year (?) ... delivered to me, like last year, (in payment) of the tithe.'¹⁷ This suggests that tithing was not only annual but also obligatory. Further, a tithe is mentioned several times in a letter from the First Babylonian dynasty as imposed or required by both the temple and the palace: 'Concerning the grain (which is) the tithe of the temple of the gods - our lord has bidden us impose a tithe of grain ... They have taken the workmen of the temple of the gods for the grain (which is) the tithe of the palace.'¹⁸ There seems to be a conflict between the temple tithe and the palace tithe, but it is not clear from the letter whether the temple tithe was obligatory on the palace and *vice versa*, but it is clear that a tithe was imposed by both temple and palace.

¹¹ Salonen (1972: 19).

¹² Salonen (1972: 19).

¹³ Salonen (1972: 20).

¹⁴ Salonen dates these sources in the mid to late 19th century.

¹⁵ CAD (4: 368); Salonen (1972: 22,23).

¹⁶ CAD (4: 368); Salonen (1972: 22).

¹⁷ Driver (1924: 54,55).

¹⁸ Driver (1924: 22,23).

Thus the tenth of the Old Assyrian period, which appears more like a civil tax, and the tenth of the Old Babylonian period, which was required by both the temple and the palace, were obligatory and probably paid by everyone, though the latter is not explicitly stated.

5.2.3. Ugaritic Sources

The Ugaritic texts designate the tithe as *m'šr*. It can be observed from the few texts where the idea occurs that the tithe at Ugarit was paid not by individuals but by the whole villages as collective bodies, not as a religious obligation but as a civil tax.¹⁹ A peculiar feature of tithe occurs at Ugarit, where the king grants particular towns and all that belonged to them as a permanent gift of tithe to his favoured officials and their families.²⁰ The almost identical idea of the royal grant of civil tithes described in 1 Sam 8:15,17 was probably patterned after the Ugaritic practice.²¹ Some have also argued that the tithes and offerings assured to the Levites and the priests (Num 18:8,21f.; Lev 7:19,34f.) were formulated in the manner of the royal grants at Ugarit and other Near Eastern cultures.²²

A ritual text from Ugarit describes tithing in a religious context, with the Ugaritians advised to vow various offerings such as a bull, a firstborn and tithes, and to seek the help of Baal in the event of an enemy's attack.²³ There is considerable dispute, however, about the doubtful text that may be rendered as 'tithe'. The restored line reads, 'š[r]t [b'l. n']šr, 'a tenth to Baal we will tithe'. The opening and closing words of the line are taken as coming from the verb 'šr, 'to tithe', by Margalit and Cartledge, but as 'banquet' by Herdner.²⁴ In other contexts at Ugarit, 'šr occurs in connection with preparation for eating and drinking, and is variously translated by scholars 'drink', or 'libation',²⁵ the two elements of a ritual banquet in the legends of Keret and Aqhat. However, the idea of 'a tithe' rather than 'a banquet' fits better in the context of a vow, because the former forms part of the incentives for the deity to act in favour of petitioners. On the other hand there is no evidence elsewhere of a 'banquet' or a 'drinking party' being vowed, although a

¹⁹ Heltzer (1976: 36-38) collects records of 31 villages of Ugarit which made grain payments as tithes to royal store-houses. Cf. Salonen (1972: 62).

²⁰ Rainey (1976: 95-96); cf. *PRU* (3: 146-47, cf. 69,70,93); Salonen (1972: 61); Heltzer (1976: 48,49).

²¹ Cf. Mendelsohn (1956: 19,20); Rainey (1976: 96-97).

²² Weinfeld (1970: 184-204; 1972a: 1157).

²³ We have no evidence that they ever actually did this, but a biblical text (2 Ki 3:26,27) probably alludes to a similar event, though it contains no mention of tithes. Cf. Margalit (1986: 62,63).

²⁴ Margalit (1986: 62); Cartledge (1992: 117-18); *Ug* (7: 36).

²⁵ So Cazelles (1951: 132,133): 'Il ne semble pas en effet dans ces textes qu'il s'agisse d'une redevance régulière, mais d'une sorte de sacrifice fait une fois pour toutes... S'il était question de batailles on eut pu y voir l'offrande d'un dixième du butin, mais ce n'est pas le cas.' He argues further that the Deuteronomic tithe associated with the eating and drinking at the central sanctuary and the 'tithe' in Amos 4:4 have similar character, and can best be understood as a 'libation'. If Cazelles's observation in these contexts is plausible, then the drink and libation of the ritual banquets were probably offerings of tithes. Cf. *ANET* (147); de Moor (1971: 71); Jagersma (1981: 118).

'libation' could be vowed. Therefore if the text meant 'tithes' it indicates that sacrifices and offerings are as much a part of cultic observance as tithes, although the obligatory aspect of the latter still remains unclear.

Thus the tithe at Ugarit was largely considered as a civil tax, although it is possible that it was considered as religious practice as well. As civil tax, it was obligatory, but as a religious practice it was probably voluntary, an effective means of seeking divine favour in times of need. More importantly, the tithe at Ugarit was granted in the form of cities to the king's favoured officials as a permanent possession. As some scholars think, this is possibly reflected in the biblical accounts of 1 Samuel, and was applied to the priestly grants in Israel.

5.2.4. Late Babylonian Sources

The frequent mention of tithes and monthly tributes in the clay tablets and their payment to the temples of Ebabarra and Eanna suggest that tithes in sixth century Babylonia were paid not to the royal treasury but to the temples.²⁶ The common word used to describe the tithe in these documents is *ešrû*.²⁷ As in Sumerian, Old Assyrian and Old Babylonian sources, the tithe was paid from all sorts of goods, like wool, sesame, dates, barley, flax, oil, garlic, clothes, cattle, sheep, birds, fish, timber, metalware and articles of silver and gold.²⁸ But in contrast to earlier periods, it was clearly imposed on all people,²⁹ including farmers, shepherds, gardeners, bakers, smiths, weavers, potters, fishermen, fief-holders, various officials, governors, priests, temple officials and even the tithe-collectors.³⁰ Kings and their family members made proportionately low payment, obviously not a tenth of their fortunes.³¹ Further, the tithe was collected on certain fixed dates, and if anyone failed to pay at the appointed time interest was charged on each month's delay.³² Sometimes the tithe was described both as a regular payment and as a gift vowed to a deity in crisis or sickness.³³ It is very clear from some texts that some deities possessed tithe lands (lands tithed to temples) which were given on lease and the proceeds were turned over to the temple.³⁴

²⁶ Dandamajew (1969: 82-90); cf. Jastrow (1898: 668); Salonen (1972: 23ff.); Milgrom (1976: 58-59).

²⁷ CAD (4: 369); Salonen (1972: 23-33).

²⁸ Dandamajew (1969: 83).

²⁹ This was probably assumed in some Sumerian sources, but is unclear in others.

³⁰ We have an interesting parallel in the Levites, who were in charge of collecting tithes and yet were required to pay to the priests a tithe of the tithe they received.

³¹ Dandamajew (1969: 84,85); cf. Salonen (1972: 43). The percentage of tithe varied from 5.5% to 13.3%, although 10% was the norm. The reason for this was probably consideration of the means of the one who paid, but why anyone would pay more than 10% is unclear.

³² Dandamajew (1969: 86,87); cf. CAD (4: 369).

³³ CAD (4: 369).

³⁴ Salonen (1972: 28); cf. CAD (4: 370).

Thus according to the late Babylonian sources tithing was obligatory, levied from all kinds of goods and from people of all walks of life. A tithe was also vowed in times of crisis, probably in addition to the obligatory dues. The tithe lands may have been the permanent property of the temple and clergy just as the Levitical cities were for the Levites. The idea of interest accruing on a deferred payment was probably unique to the late Babylonian period.

5.3. The tithe in Israel

The Hebrew Bible is our only source for an understanding of the tithe in Israel. The Bible makes no attempt to trace the origin and the practice of tithing, but simply assumes the concept and the practice. The verb עָשָׂר, 'to tithe', and the noun מַעֲשֵׂר, 'tithe', together occur forty one times in the Bible,³⁵ 22 times in the Pentateuch alone. Thus much of our information about the Israelite concept of tithe comes from the Pentateuch which sets a complex legislation on the subject, in contrast to the mere description of practice in ancient Near Eastern texts. The texts outside the Pentateuch are largely concerned with the misuse (Amos 4:4), lapses (Mal 3:8,10) and restoration (Neh 10:38,39; 12:44; 13:5,12; 2 Chr 31:5,6,12) of the practice in Israel. We shall first consider the sources and then briefly summarise the legislation on tithes in Israel, and finally compare the idea of Israelite tithe with that of the ANE. This will give a basis for subsequent discussion of tithes in the patriarchal narratives.

5.3.1. Sources

In contrast to the ancient Near Eastern sources which often report individuals (frequently by name) who brought (or failed to bring) tithes from various commodities, there is not a single instance in the Bible (except in Genesis) where a specific individual is reported to have brought (or failed to bring) the tithe to God. Thus all the texts, especially pentateuchal texts (minus Genesis), are concerned more with the legislation about the practice than what was currently happening, suggesting that the legislation arose in order to standardise the pre-existing custom. Thus we will not know what was the practice of tithing in Israel prior to the legislation, although certain traces of it may still be seen in that legislation. The Pentateuchal legislation on tithing has been ascribed chiefly to two sources, namely the Priestly (Lev 27:30-33; Num 18:21-28) and the Deuteronomic (Deut

³⁵ עָשָׂר occurs 9 times (Gen 28:22[x2]; Deut 14:22[x2]; 26:12; 1 Sam 8:15,17; Neh 10:38,39), and מַעֲשֵׂר 32 times (Gen 14:20; Lev 27:30,31,32; Num 18:21,24,26[x3],28; Deut 12:6,11,17; 14:23,28; 26:12[x2]; Ezek 45:11,14; Amos 4:4; Mal 3:8,10; Neh 10:38,39[twice]; 12:44; 13:5,12; 2 Chr 31:5,6[x2], 12). The references in Ezek 45:11,14 are not relevant to tithing, and hence are left out of consideration here. Jagersma's reference (1981: 117 n.4) to Gen 28:22 and 2 Sam 8:15,17 (printed as 18:15,17), as having a noun form is incorrect.

12:6,11,17; 14:22-28; 26:12-15). There is no consensus, however, about the dating of the sources or the nature of the tithe described in them.³⁶ While most scholars date the Deuteronomic sources to the pre-exilic period, they differ widely on the Priestly sources.³⁷ Our aim here is not so much to date the sources and investigate the origin and the development of the idea of the tithe in different sources as to approach the sources synchronically in order to see the practice of tithing in Israel in its totality. It appears that a single basic tithe institution is reflected in different ways in the sources, and its essential character was that it was paid as a sacred due to the temple and its personnel.³⁸ The Israelite concept of tithes may be summarised as follows: the tithe was from both animals and land produce, paid to the temple, obligatory and annual. However, Israelite law concerning tithes may be summarised in the following five points.

5.3.2. Legislation

First, Israelite law prescribed that all the tithe, כל-מעשר - that is of the animals from herds and flocks, בקר וצאן, and of the farm-produce from the field and trees, מפרי הארץ, belonged to Yahweh and was sacred, קדש (Lev 27:30-33; cf. 2 Chr 31:6³⁹). Deuteronomic law (Deut 12:6,11,17) limits the tithe to land produce only, but its sanctity was maintained by including it among the sacred gifts along with the burnt-offerings, sacrifices, firstlings, votive offerings and free-will offerings. Similarly, Amos and Malachi mention tithes along with sacrifices, זבחים, and offerings, חרומה, which probably indicates their sacred character (Amos 4:4; Mal 3:8).⁴⁰ The fact that the tithe was said to be 'holy' and belonged to Yahweh suggests that, like the 'firstlings' (v. 26), it was 'non-dedicatory' and mandatory.⁴¹ Malachi (3:9,10) not only confirms that the tithes were obligatory, but notes that deferring their payment would be a serious offence of stealing from God himself, and conversely that overflowing blessing awaited those who paid them faithfully.

Secondly, any agricultural tithe may be redeemed by adding a fifth to its value,⁴² but under no circumstance may a tithed animal be redeemed or exchanged.⁴³ If any animal was exchanged, both the animal and that for which it was exchanged became Yahweh's,

³⁶ Herman (1991: 35,36).

³⁷ While Wellhausen, Eissfeldt and Jagersma date P source on the tithe to the post-exilic period, Weinfeld dates it to pre-exilic period. Milgrom dates P and D as roughly contemporaneous and pre-exilic, while McConville (1984: 68-87,154-56) thinks that precise dating of sources is impossible, but where P and D deal with similar laws such as tithes, the former preceded the latter. Herman (1991: 9-37) follows McConville and rejects all methods of dating the sources. Employing a synchronic approach, he argues that in Israelite tithes a compulsory exchange of livestock and farm-produce were given to the Levites in return for divine blessing.

³⁸ McConville (1984: 74).

³⁹ This is the only other text that explicitly supports the animal tithe prescribed in Leviticus.

⁴⁰ Cf. Jagersma (1981: 122).

⁴¹ Milgrom (1976: 56); *contra* Kaufmann (1961: 190); Weinfeld (1972a: 1158).

⁴² Interestingly, Deuteronomy allows commuting, but does not require additional one-fifth to it.

⁴³ Milgrom (1976: 59).

and could not be redeemed. Interestingly, the land tithe in Babylon was also commutable, while the animal tithe could not be exchanged or redeemed.⁴⁴

Thirdly, the tithe in Israel was granted to the Levites and their families as a permanent inheritance for their service in the sanctuary in lieu of a tribal possession (Num 18:21,24,26,28). Some scholars think that the whole tithe was given to the priests because the whole tithe was declared as 'holy',⁴⁵ while others argue that only the animal tithe which was unredeemable and probably holier than the land tithe went to the priests, while the land tithe went to the Levites.⁴⁶ The Levites, however, were required to pay a 'tithe of the tithe', *מַעֲשֵׂר מִן־הַמַּעֲשֵׂר*, as their 'gift' or 'offering', *תְּרוּמָה*, to the priests (cf. Neh 10:39), but there is no law requiring the priests to pay tithes.⁴⁷ The Ugaritic parallel of tithe awards to the king's favoured officials and the similar allusions to such practice during the time of Samuel (1 Sam 8:15,17), allow us to think of an early origin of this law in Israel,⁴⁸ although Israel adapted it entirely to her religious context.⁴⁹ Further, Levites, as tithe-collectors and tithe-givers (Neh 10:38,39), have their counterparts in Sumerian and late Babylonian sources.⁵⁰ The Deuteronomic law (14:22-28), however, does not assign the tithe to the Levites or priests,⁵¹ but allows it to be enjoyed by the worshipper and his guests in a sacred feast at the central sanctuary every year, and the Levites were invited to participate in it along with other needy persons every third year only. It is possible, however, that according to v. 27 the Levites joined the family sacrificial feast every year.⁵² Further, Deuteronomy seems to assume knowledge of the Levitical tithe in Numbers, since it reminds the Israelites not to forsake the Levite who has 'no portion or inheritance with you' (14:27,29), and the addition of *נַחֲלָה* to *חֶלֶק* is certainly explanatory since Numbers uses only *נַחֲלָה* and states that the idea of 'no inheritance' to the Levites is to be a perpetual statute.⁵³

⁴⁴ Milgrom (1976: 59).

⁴⁵ Kaufmann, Weinfeld, Milgrom.

⁴⁶ Cf. Milgrom (1976: 56).

⁴⁷ Cf. Milgrom (1976: 60).

⁴⁸ Weinfeld (1972a: 1159-60) thinks that the Levitical tithe arose during the time of David who granted the Levitical cities with their tithes to the Levites, who were loyal functionaries at David's newly occupied cities in the borders. It is possible, however, that David was acting in accordance with a previously known practice.

⁴⁹ For Milgrom (1976: 57) the distinction between the temple and royal tithe in Israel is sometimes been lost, 'since temples were ipso facto royal temples (Amos 7:13) and the kings controlled their treasuries (1 Kgs 15:18, 2 Kgs 12:19; 18:15) and were responsible for their maintenance (2 Kgs 12:7-17; 22:3-7; Ezek 45:17; 2 Chr 31:3ff.)'.

⁵⁰ Milgrom (1976: 60 n.211). The rabbinic tradition supports this view, according to which the Levites were given their tithes on the threshing-floor. Weinfeld (1972a: 1161).

⁵¹ It is possible that the whole tithe was not consumed by the worshippers, but payments to the sanctuary were deducted before it was given for a feast. Von Rad (1966: 103); Mays (1979: 245-46); Jagersma (1981: 118).

⁵² Noth (1968: 137); cf. Driver (1902: 167,170).

⁵³ There is contradiction between Numbers which designates the whole tithe to the Levites and priests, and Deuteronomy which makes it a charity. On the basis of LXX Deut 26:12, Tobia 1:7-8, and Josephus's

Fourthly, the tithe in Israel was paid annually, or from every crop. This is not clear from Leviticus or Numbers, which seem to be concerned more with the sanctity and ownership of the tithe rather than its frequency. Deuteronomy, however, makes it clear that the tithe was to be brought to the central sanctuary every year,⁵⁴ and it could be given to charity in other towns every third year. It is possible that the Deuteronomic reformers innovated this scheme in conformity with their humanitarian concern evident elsewhere (12:18f.; 16:11), because the local sanctuaries were abolished and the Levites were made redundant.⁵⁵ However, it leaves the question of the support of the Levites serving at the central sanctuary unanswered.⁵⁶

Fifthly, the whole tithe was given the character of a sacrificial feast to be enjoyed every year by the worshipper and his household at the central sanctuary. The tone of the feasting, the conversion of tithe without augmentation and the idea of buying whatever one desired at the sanctuary might suggest that Deuteronomy relieved the tithe from its inherent sanctity conceived in earlier legislation.⁵⁷ But Deuteronomy included the tithe among the sacred gifts (12:6,11), clearly designated it as 'sacred portion' (26:12,13) and further charged the owner to make a solemn declaration that the tithe was not removed in a state of ritual uncleanness or used for profane purposes. This strongly suggests that Deuteronomy added a social dimension to tithes while affirming their sanctity.⁵⁸ A number of late Babylonian texts also consider tithe as an offering or sacrificial meal.⁵⁹

5.3.3. Comparative analysis

Israel's idea of tithe reflects almost every view that was already present one way or the other in the ANE. The tithe in Israel was collected from animals and farm-produce, from laity and clergy (cf. Sumer); it was paid as civil tax as well as religious levy (cf. Old Assyrian and Old Babylonian periods); it was granted to the king's officials as well as to the Levites and priests (cf. Ugarit, Late Babylonian period); it was paid by all except kings

Antiquities iv.22, Jewish legalists made attempts to harmonise this discrepancy by supposing that the tithe in Deuteronomy refers to a *second* tithe in addition to the normal (first) tithe prescribed in Leviticus-Numbers; the first tithe was prescribed for the payment of the clergy while the second tithe was meant for a religious feast. And a '*third tithe*' levied every third year, that is the year of tithing, was meant for the poor. However, this interpretation was not universally held even among the Jews, and most modern critics generally regard as implausible.

⁵⁴ The unusual text in Amos 4:4 mentions a practice of sacrifices every morning, and tithes every three days. While the former was a usual practice, the latter was unusual. Some scholars suggest that this was probably a reference to the practice during some festive season when the worshipper offered his זבח on the first morning and his מעשר on the third day. Harper (1936: 91); Mays (1969b: 75); Rudolph (1971: 176).

⁵⁵ Cf. Mays (1979: 246).

⁵⁶ It is probable that the Jerusalem temple could support its clergy and cultic activities with the voluntary offerings of the people (Deut 12:6,11,17-18,26-27) and with the king's subsidies (1 Ki 9:25; Ezek 45:17; 2 Chr 8:12-13; 31:3ff.). Milgrom (1976: 57).

⁵⁷ So Weinfeld (1972b: 215).

⁵⁸ Cf. Milgrom (1976: 56). Contrast Driver (1902: 172-73).

⁵⁹ Salonen (1972: 38).

and priests, and collected by temple personnel and stored at the temple (cf. Late Babylonian practice). Nevertheless, none of the sources of the ANE makes explicitly religious sanctions on the practice of tithing as we find them in the Bible. This suggests that Israel consciously adapted the practice known from her neighbours to her own religious context. The idea of the tithe as divine grants to the Levites who had no inheritance in Israel gives a rationale for tithes to be paid to them, and an obligation on Israel because the Levites also served at the temple. This is probably unique to Israel.

5.4. The tithe in the patriarchal narratives

The concept of the tithe occurs only in two contexts in the patriarchal narratives, once with Abraham following a successful expedition, and once with Jacob's vow to God where Jacob promised to give a tenth if God looked after him. We note at the outset that neither context is unique to the patriarchs. As we have observed above, several texts from the Sumerian period from the dynasty of Larsa describe tithing following an expedition as common, and tithing as part of a vow was known from Old Babylonian and Ugaritic sources. Similarly, Israel appears to have known the practice of tithing in the context of an expedition, as a secular tax, and more importantly, as a religious obligation. We shall examine patriarchal practices in the light of these parallels.

5.4.1. Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek

According to Gen 14, Abraham gave a tenth of all his booty to the Canaanite king Melchizedek when he returned from a war expedition against the kings of the East. As a whole, Genesis 14 poses many difficult problems, with some scholars describing it as an 'isolated boulder' unrelated either to the preceding or the following texts, but others argue its essential coherence in its present context.⁶⁰ Our main concern is with vv. 18-20, in which the encounter between Melchizedek and Abraham and the exchange of gifts took place. There is no consensus over whether this episode is integral to Gen 14.⁶¹ The chief problems in this passage have been the identities of Melchizedek, king of Salem, and of the God El Elyon, in whose name he pronounced a blessing on Abraham. If Salem was in any

⁶⁰ It has apparent reminiscences of only three words from J and another three from P. While one third of the chapter contains proper names, a high percentage of the remaining words and expressions are either rare or unattested elsewhere in the OT. Further, two or three different genres seem to have been put together: while the first part of the chapter (vv. 1-12) resembles an annalistic report, the second part (vv. 13-17, 21-24) the hero stories of Judges. The Melchizedek incident seems to be an altogether different element which strangely intrudes a post-war settlement between Abraham and the king of Sodom. Cf. Emerton, (1971a: 24-47; 1971b: 407-39); McConville (1993: 112ff.).

⁶¹ Skinner (1930: 156, 269), Speiser (1964: 105ff.) and Wenham (1987: 307) think that it is integral to Gen 14, while von Rad (1965: 174), Emerton (1971: 431f.), van Seters (1975: 299) and Westermann (1985: 191-92) see it as an insertion.

way related to Jerusalem,⁶² Melchizedek⁶³ probably ruled over the city during the time of Abraham, like Adonizedek did later (Judg 10:1,3). It is difficult to associate the compound name El Elyon⁶⁴ and the compound title 'the creator of heavens and the earth' with any known deity in the Canaanite or other pantheon, because neither the name nor the title are attested outside the Bible.⁶⁵ On the other hand, since Elyon in the present context is in apposition with both El and Yahweh (v. 22), and the only other occurrence of the compound El Elyon (Ps 78:35) parallels Elohim,⁶⁶ it is probable that the Genesis author adapted 'El Elyon' as a designation for the God of Israel, who was most frequently referred to as either Yahweh or Elohim, but it is still possible that the author or his sources know that El Elyon was the god of Melchizedek, because the latter is explicitly described as כהן עליון. However, other biblical references probably reflect no pre-Israelite view of El

⁶² The only other occurrence of this name is in Ps 76:3, where it is equated with Zion; so also Genesis Apocryphon, Targum Onkelos, Targum Jonathan, Josephus, *Ant.* i.2, (cf. LXX Jer 48:5 [MT 41:5]; Judith 4:4). Ur-Salim (cf. John 3:23) is well attested in the Tel Amarna letters, although the shortened form Salem is still unattested outside the Bible. For various suggestions, see Albright (1961: 52); Haran (1965: 45 n.14); Smith (1965: 141-45). Salem as a place name is most appropriate in the context, since מלך-סדם is used several times in the same way. For examples where the first element of the compound name was dropped from place names, see Josh 19:6 and 15:32; Josh 15:30 and 1 Chr 4:29; Josh 13:17 and Num 32:38; cf. Aharoni (1979: 115-16); Emerton (1990a: 57). The Salem tradition probably concerned a different place, and came to be identified with Jerusalem later; so Emerton (1971: 413); Jagersma (1981: 120).

⁶³ Attempts to unravel the origin and background of this figure through etymological study have produced no satisfactory results; Noth (1928: 161 n.4); Fisher (1962: 265); Rosenberg (1965: 162-65). The name appears in the Babylonian King List from the time of the Old Babylonian period. Speiser (1964: 104); Westermann (1985: 204). Ps 110:4, the only other place where Melchizedek occurs in the Hebrew Bible, describes Yahweh's promise to a Davidic king of an eternal office of priesthood like that of Melchizedek's. The text assumes that Melchizedek's office of priesthood is an established tradition of antiquity, 'to which the ideal king of Israel, ruling on the same spot, must conform'; Driver (1948: 167). Some scholars think that this text is a scribal note, and the Psalm comes from post-exilic times, but this view is refuted by Emerton (1971b: 415). Gunkel (1902: 252) had already observed the improbability of the post-exilic community, which was prejudiced against all sorts of paganism, especially Canaanite, searching for a Canaanite model of High-priesthood.

⁶⁴ While El occurs at Ugarit as a personal name and as an appellation, Elyon does not appear at all. El and Elyon occur as distinct deities in the eighth century Sefire texts (cf. ch. 4 n. 61). According to Hittite and Phoenician sources, Elyon, a celestial deity, was older than El by two 'divine generations', and the grandfather of El; cf. della Vida (1944: 8,9); Pope (1951: 52,55). Further, the title קנה שמים וארץ attached to El Elyon in this context is not found with El in Ugarit; Pope (1955: 52-54); Rendtorff (1966: 286-87). The eighth century BC Phoenician, and the first century AD Neo-Punic inscriptions, however, describe El as the 'creator of the earth', but not 'creator of heaven and the earth'; cf. O'Callaghan (1949: 203-5). Given this, the interpretation of El Elyon in Melchizedek's blessing is widely varied. For some scholars, El Elyon was an artificial combination of El, the lord of the earth, and Elyon, the lord of heavens, a theological speculation of the Genesis author; so della Vida (1944: 9), Cross (1962: 241-42). However, if this was the theological achievement of the author of Genesis, he might be expected to have used this title more consistently in Genesis, especially in the first chapter where creation of heavens and earth is the main theme, but it is conspicuously absent. While only אלהים is used in Gen 1 and 2, both אלהים and אל are used separately and together throughout Genesis.

⁶⁵ Rendtorff (1966: 284).

⁶⁶ Besides this, עליון occurs both alone, though not entirely in isolation from other divine names (Deut 32:8; Ps 9:3; Isa 14:14; Lam 3:35), and in apposition with Yahweh (Ps 47:3), Elohim and El (Pss 57:3; 78:56). Elyon also occurs in parallelism with El (Num 24:16; Pss 73:11; 77:10-11; 78:17; 107:11), with Elohim (Pss 46:5; 50:14; 73:11; 82:6) and with Yahweh (2 Sam 22:14; Pss 7:18; 9:2-3; 18:14; 21:8; 83:18; 87:5-6; 89:1-2, 9; 92:2; Lam 3:37-38 with אדני). In the Aramaic Daniel the plural עליונים is used to describe '(the saints of) the Most High', קדיש עליונים (7:25,27).

Elyon.⁶⁷ What then is the significance of this to the patriarchal religion? Since this name does not appear again in the narratives it is reasonable to think that it was not one of the names of the God of the fathers. This name with the blessing of Melchizedek probably survived in the sources of the Genesis author, who tried to identify El Elyon with Yahweh in Abraham's response to the blessing because he did not appreciate Abraham being blessed by El Elyon alone. Therefore El Elyon was a Canaanite god whom Abraham probably did not know but whom later Israelite authors assimilated into the Yahwistic religious ethos.

We are not told why Melchizedek did not join the coalition against the Eastern kings, but on hearing of Abraham's victorious return he came to greet Abraham and his exhausted troops and offer them refreshments, probably on behalf of the coalition.⁶⁸ The text clearly describes Melchizedek both as king and priest, and it is not uncommon in the ANE for a king to assume the priestly office as well.⁶⁹ The context of meeting suggests either diplomatic or religious reasons, even as the whole account is loaded with cultic language of priesthood, blessing and tithes suggesting that 'cultic exchange' took place between Melchizedek and Abraham.⁷⁰ Was Melchizedek pronouncing a priestly blessing on Abraham? Was Abraham paying a tithe as a religious obligation at a Canaanite shrine? Was there any cult or ritual involved? We need to examine the passage closely in order to establish the nature of the exchange and its bearing, if any, upon the religion of the patriarch.

In the exchange that took place in vv. 18-20, Melchizedek brought bread and wine for Abraham and his men and bestowed a blessing on him, while Abraham gave him a tenth of the booty. It is probable, as many have observed, that the bread and wine were refreshments for the exhausted troops of Abraham. A clear gesture of friendship and welcome was implicit in this act, but was Melchizedek's blessing a cultic blessing? It is hardly likely that the blessing of a priest-king would have no religious overtones. First, Abraham's encampment was in the King's Valley, probably in the vicinity of Salem, on the way to Abraham's home in Hebron. The author says that Melchizedek brought out, *והציא*, his gifts to meet Abraham in the valley, suggesting that the exchange took place in the open country. Thus there was probably no organised cult involved in the pronouncement of Melchizedek's blessing.⁷¹ Secondly, whether cultic or non-cultic, blessing had a fixed form in the ANE and Israel.⁷² It was often pronounced both as a thanksgiving to God for

⁶⁷ *Contra* Eissfeldt (1956: 29-30); cf. della Vida (1944: 2).

⁶⁸ Cf. Skinner (1930: 270).

⁶⁹ Skinner (1930: 268); van Selms (1958: 210). Cf. the biblical examples of kings (David and Solomon) and judges (Samuel) who sometimes also assumed the priestly office. But see Wenham (1985: 79-82).

⁷⁰ Westermann (1985: 203).

⁷¹ Cf. Towner (1968: 388-89).

⁷² See ch. 3 for form and setting of 'blessing'.

his saving actions and as a prayer-wish for the protection and prosperity of the one being blessed. It appears that these intentions were combined in Melchizedek's blessing. Abraham is the subject of ברוך in the first sentence, 'Blessed be Abram by El Elyon...', suggesting a prayer-wish for the safekeeping of Abraham. In the second sentence El Elyon is the subject and his deliverance of Abraham is then noted, suggesting a thanksgiving. This kind of spontaneous and non-cultic blessing was frequently used in conversations between persons.⁷³ This probably means that Abraham received a spontaneous blessing in the name of the god of Melchizedek, who was later identified with Yahweh by the Genesis author. If the blessing was non-cultic, and the context of meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek was friendly, why then did Abraham give a tithe of the booty to Melchizedek?

Most versions render Gen 14:20b as 'And Abram gave him a tenth of everything,' but the subject of the sentence in Hebrew is the personal pronoun 'he', not 'Abram'. Some scholars take Melchizedek as the subject of this sentence, since he was the subject of the author's report in v. 18 and of the speech in vv. 19 and 20a. Having seen the ominous presence of Abraham the aggressor, Melchizedek gave a tithe to prevent him from attacking his city.⁷⁴ However, the mood of the story appears no longer to be aggression but peace and a post-war settlement, in which Abraham was willing to give up the booty which was rightfully his. It seems rather that it was Abraham's natural response to share a tenth of the booty with the local priest-king who had received him with refreshments and blessed him by the name of El Elyon 'who delivered your enemies into your hand.'⁷⁵ Therefore it is probable that it was Abraham who gave the tenth to Melchizedek, not vice versa.

If our reading of the text so far is correct, it is improbable that Abraham was employed by Melchizedek to fight his battles.⁷⁶ Others have suggested that Abraham was following the ancient laws of 'booty-restoration', which required equal distribution of booty with those who did not actively participate in the battle.⁷⁷ This would be plausible if we accepted Albright's suggestion that *melek šelōmōh* meant 'a king allied to him (Abraham)', but this is unlikely.⁷⁸ Moreover, the story mentions Aner, Eshcol and Mamre as his allies, but no other king. In Num 31 the Israelite army shared a huge spoil recovered from the Midianites with the non-combatant rest of the congregation in some form of 'booty-restoration', yet what was shared was not a tenth but half the spoil (v. 27). Abraham's situation does not appear to be similar. The Israelite incident involved an offering to Yahweh from the booty, and even this was not a tenth: it was a five-hundredth from the soldiers' half and a fiftieth from the congregation's half (vv. 28-30). Further, the

⁷³ Cf. Ex 18:10; Ruth 4:14; 1 Sam 25:32,39; 2 Sam 18:28; 1 Ki 1:48; etc.

⁷⁴ Smith (1965: 134).

⁷⁵ Cf. Westermann (1985: 203ff.).

⁷⁶ So Fisher (1962: 269).

⁷⁷ Muffs (1982: 88-96).

⁷⁸ See Albright in note 62.

commanders of the Israelite army made offerings from gold and jewellery for their atonement (vv. 50-52). Prior to their offering, they were ritually purified (vv. 22,23), and the soldiers themselves ritually cleansed before they entered the camp (vv. 19,20,24). The whole post-war operation appears to be highly religious and highly significant both for the community and for the soldiers. Thus this Israelite practice was entirely different from Abraham's action.

As already noted, the practice of offering the deity a portion of the booty was an established norm in the ANE,⁷⁹ although it was not necessarily ten per cent. In the Sumerian dynasty of Larsa a tithe was paid following an 'expedition' of war or business.⁸⁰ In paying a tenth, Abraham was probably following the Mesopotamian practice. It is not certain, however, whether he was pledging his allegiance to the deity of Melchizedek. The present context certainly represents the deity as Canaanite in Melchizedek's understanding and Israelite in Abraham's understanding, but the author meant that Abraham paid a tenth to the Canaanite priest-king. The author did not mean that Abraham paid the tenth to Yahweh because he knew that there were no priests or sanctuaries involved in the patriarchal religious activities and no Israelite tithing laws applied to the patriarchs. The idea of paying a tenth may have been motivated by Melchizedek's hospitality and blessing and not been Abraham's usual practice, which was rather to build an altar and call upon the name of God. Further, neither priests nor the name El Elyon appear again in the patriarchal narratives. Thus this appears to be a unique action of Abraham. Further, Abraham is portrayed as the officiant in all the cultic activities he undertook, and it does not appear that he paid tithes anywhere, although his frequent action of building altars imply offering sacrifices to God. Therefore Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek was not part of his own normal religious practice, but being a deeply religious person he did not hesitate to pay a tenth to the Canaanite priest-king who extended hospitality and blessing. The author did not mean that Abraham offered worship to the god of Melchizedek nor did he reject his blessing. This is quite in conformity with the nature of the patriarchal religion which is neither polemic nor exclusivistic. The issue that 'you shall have no other god before me' did not exist for the patriarchs, neither did they really engage in worshipping other gods. Abraham's religion is portrayed as family oriented and his God as personal and family-bound. To this end Abraham is portrayed as being faithful to this God who is portrayed as making no demands of sacrifices, offerings or tithes as he did with later Israel.

5.4.2. Jacob's tithe

Jacob's promise of tithes is part of a larger vow (Gen 28:20-22) in which Jacob promised that he would make Yahweh his God and build a sanctuary for him. The vow

⁷⁹ Cf. 5.2 above.

⁸⁰ Salonen (1972: 19,20).

concludes: וְכָל אֲשֶׁר תִּתֶּנִּי לִי עֹשֶׂה לְךָ, 'and of all that you give me I will surely give a tenth to you' (v. 22b). As will be argued in chapter 6 below, the vow was not a secondary insertion but a logical conclusion of the Bethel narrative (28:10-22).⁸¹ The tithe being one of the things vowed, it is reasonable to think that it formed part of Jacob's religious obligation. Nevertheless, when decades later Jacob finally returned safely to Bethel, the condition stipulated in his vow, he only built an altar and did not present a tithe. Therefore several scholars suggest that the story simply reflects the author's desire to justify bringing tithes to the busy sedentary cult centre Bethel.⁸²

However, if the passage is from the Yahwist, there is no reason why he should press people to bring tithes to Bethel, since Jerusalem would have been more appropriate for his concern. Moreover, Bethel was already an established cult centre since pre-monarchic times (Judg 20:18; 1 Sam 10:4),⁸³ and those who worshipped there all along would have continued to do so. The author could hardly have come from the time of the divided monarchy, since such advice would not have been acceptable to the official Yahwist, who thought Bethel an illegitimate cult centre, and would not have been accepted into the official tradition. Further, if the author was so concerned to show that the patriarch vowed a tithe at Bethel, he would surely have added that he also paid it there. This would have not only strengthened his case but also portrayed the patriarch in a better light.

Therefore the author was not legitimising the place. Nor was he legitimising tithes. There is no reason to think that tithes were novel to the Israelites, who were aware of them since the pre-monarchic times, at least as secular tax.⁸⁴ The pentateuchal tithe laws, whatever their date, reflect only the time of the standardisation of tithing in Israel, not the origin of the practice. The evidence from the ANE clearly suggests that the practice, as both secular and sacred tax, was very ancient. Therefore there is no reason to think that the author was legitimising the tithe by the example of the patriarch, especially when the patriarch did not actually pay it. So this was an anomaly in the traditions received by the Yahwist who had to put up with his traditions at hand. Contrary to his own beliefs the Genesis author had no difficulty in portraying patriarchs as building altars and offering sacrifices without the assistance of official priests, or as having direct access to Yahweh through dreams and visions and interceding on behalf of others. Thus the author here was simply reporting a received tradition.

It is probable that Jacob vowed tithes to God following the popular custom in the ANE where things such as a sanctuary, tithes, sacrifices and offerings were promised by

⁸¹ See ch. 6.4. Cf. de Pury (1975: 436-38); Wenham (1994: 224).

⁸² De Pury (1975: 444-46); Westermann (1985: 460).

⁸³ Cf. Amos 4:4; LXX 1 Sam 1:21.

⁸⁴ Cf. 1 Sam 8:15,17.

worshippers.⁸⁵ There is no reason to think that vowing a tithe fits only with a sedentary lifestyle, not with Jacob's nomadic lifestyle, though the parallels from the ANE imply established cult centres. The latter also imply regular annual tithes, while Jacob's vow was a single obligation⁸⁶ to be fulfilled when God on his part fulfilled the condition stipulated. The other two obligations - that he would make Yahweh his God and raise the pillar as a sanctuary - also seem to be single actions, although Jacob managed to fulfil only the first of them. This may mean that the place had not yet become a fully-fledged cult-centre, with no clergy to receive tithes. If, as we argued in chapter 4, it was an obscure place, the promise to raise a shrine and pay tithes could not have been fulfilled, since these involved a community and a clergy. Alternatively, it is possible that Jacob, and probably other patriarchs, normally used the tithes and offerings for the sacrifices and the subsequent cultic feast. The Deuteronomic law, in which the tithes were allowed to be used for the sacrifices and the cultic feast, probably goes back to the patriarchal practice.

5.5. Conclusion

The tithe in the patriarchal narratives occurs only in two contexts: first with Abraham, who paid from his booty to the priest-king Melchizedek, and secondly with Jacob, who vowed a tithe in a crisis situation but did not pay it. In contrast to the tithe practices in the ANE and Israel, tithing in these two instances was not a regular annual tithe, but a single voluntary payment. It is not clear whether Abraham's tithe was a religious obligation, although it is possible that, by paying a tenth to a priest, he was following a common practice of the ANE where a portion of the booty was paid to the deity. But this was not part of his regular religious activity, which normally involved building altars and calling upon the name of God with neither priests nor established cult involved. The practice of paying a portion from the booty was also followed by the Israelites who recovered booty from the Midianites, but here it was clearly associated with religious sanctions and appropriate ceremonies. Jacob's tithe was part of his vow, and thus certainly a religious obligation. He probably paid it in the form of sacrifices and offering during the religious feast he observed in fulfilment of his vow to God. Unlike in the ANE and Israel, Jacob's tithe was not paid to a temple or clergy. Thus the patriarchs' tithes, while resembling ancient Near Eastern and Israelite practices, were distinct from them and were compatible with their own lifestyle and religion which fit with lack of established, organised cult.

⁸⁵ Cf. Sumerian, Old Babylonian and Ugaritic parallels above; also see *ANET* (349,350); Margalit (1986: 62-63); Cartledge (1992: 75,82).

⁸⁶ Cf. Sarna (1989: 201).

Chapter 6

Vows

6.1. Introduction

The concept of vow making is the second of patriarchal religious practices that we are concerned here. It occurs only in the Jacob cycle in the same context where Jacob raised a pillar at Bethel (Gen 28:20-22). However, the fulfilment of Jacob's vow is only alluded to but not clearly stated (Gen 35:1-4), though this is an important, if not indispensable, aspect of vow making in both the ANE and Israel. The ambiguity around the fulfilment, and the non-cultic context of Jacob's vow contribute to the distinctive nature of vow making in patriarchal narratives. As in previous chapters, we shall show how vow making forms part of Jacob's religion and yet remains to be distinctive to his own lifestyle and religion.

It is widely recognised that vow-making was a universal custom in ancient religions,¹ and 'as old as the feeling for God and the experience of distress.'² Distress and 'feeling for God' are especially linked with making vows, since almost all the vows that we know of, whether from the Bible or from the ANE, arose out of some kind of human predicament in which the individual or the group sought divine help.³ Jacob's vow is no exception in this regard. Nevertheless, since this is the only instance of a vow in the patriarchal narratives, and since most religious activities of the patriarchs lack religious sanction or precedent, it is difficult to interpret them precisely. Hence we need to examine, as in previous chapters, the broader context of the life and setting of people who were engaged in vow making in the ANE and Israel in order to elucidate the patriarchal texts. We shall deal first with the evidence in the ANE and Israel and then with the vow text in the Jacob-cycle of the patriarchal narratives.

6.2. Vows in the Ancient Near East

In this section we shall explore the evidence from the traditions of Israel's neighbours, especially from Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Hittite and Ugaritic sources, most of

¹ *DB* (4: 872).

² *ERE* (12: 654).

³ Nazirite vows of the Bible are an exception.

which belong to the second and first millennium BC. It would be impossible to deal in detail with the date, composition and structure of each vow in these sources. This would require a separate study on its own and would not be relevant to our purpose here.⁴ Our aim is to know when people in the patriarchal world made vows, why they did so, what they promised, and how they fulfilled them.

The evidence suggests that vow making as a religious practice was widely known in all the cultures of the ANE. Vows were usually made in times of crisis, and it was expected that vows once made would be fulfilled, since otherwise the gods would be angry and cause sickness on those who failed to fulfil them.

6.2.1. Mesopotamian vows

Though there is no specific word for vow in Sumerian, the idea of a conditional promise to a deity in return for a favour is clearly present. Vows in Sumer, as elsewhere, were usually made in a situation of crisis. As in biblical vows, not only concrete gifts but also abstract praise was promised to the gods, since praise was considered as much a food to the deity as was sacrifice.⁵ The Sumerian letter prayer (from the Neo-Sumerian period, prior to and during the Old Babylonian period) which we considered above (3.1), also illustrates the Sumerian idea of vow. To a lengthy prayer is attached an equally lengthy vow of praise in which Sin-šamuh the scribe, apparently confined to bed or isolated from the general public by deadly sickness, promised the deity that he would dwell in his gates, sing his praises, proclaim his exaltation, and appear to the public as a witness if the deity removed his sin and guilt and rescued him from the grave.⁶ Similarly, in another letter prayer a woman worshipper who was haunted by a demon promised to the deity a house, worship, allegiance and the title, 'The one who helps the haunted!'⁷ Though these are not psalms, the promise of praise and the motivation for it have clear parallels in Israelite psalms of petition where the vow of praise is a constant component. In other psalms where the vow is lacking, it appears in various different forms.⁸ Both in Israel and among her neighbours, the vow of praise usually appears at the end of the petition, indicating that the vow is conditional. As Westermann observes: 'The praise of God in Israel is essentially praise after the petition has been answered.'⁹ The Sumerian woman's promise, however, resembles Jacob's vow, though the situation and the motivation are different.

Vows appear extensively in Assyrian and Babylonian literature: in temple records, building inscriptions, letters, omen literature and formal prayers. However, the vocabulary

⁴ Cf. Cartledge's (1992) excellent work in this regard.

⁵ Westermann (1981: 77).

⁶ Hallo (1968: 86); cf. Cartledge (1992: 75).

⁷ Falkenstein - von Soden (1953: 218,19); cf. Cartledge (1992: 75).

⁸ E.g. report (Ps 73:28), exhortation (Pss 27:14; 31:24), future condition (Ps 43:4 cf. 6:5; 88:10,12; Isa 38:18), or praise itself (Pss 6:8-9; 10:16,17,18; 12:6; 102:24b-27), Westermann (1981: 75 n.24).

⁹ Westermann (1981: 152 cf. 36-39).

is distinctive. The Akkadian *nadāru* means 'to rage' or 'to be wild', and is not related to the Northwest Semitic root *ndr*, which means 'vow' in Hebrew, Phoenician and Ugaritic. The Akkadian noun *ikribū* and its cognate verb *karābu*, however, belong to the general vocabulary of prayer and benediction, and could be used specifically to mean 'vow' just as *qārāb* was so used in biblical Hebrew.¹⁰

Several examples from the Old Babylonian period illustrate conditional vows in the Akkadian sources. In one, from temple records, Adad Shar-ili vowed one-sixth of a grain of silver for the healing of Awil Adad. Apparently a third person would pay the dues when Awil Adad was healed: 'When (he is) healthy and whole, Idyatum will pay his vow to Sin...' ¹¹ In another, from 'temple loans', ¹² a deity appears as creditor. Individuals with various troubles or sickness could turn to deities and make vows which were considered as loans to the temple, and the payment was not expected until the individual was delivered from trouble. The relevant texts are called *shalmu baltu* texts because the clause *ina baltu u shalmu*, 'when he is physically well or solvent', often occurs. But the fact that *ikribu* occurred together with loans has led scholars to think that some loans were basically vows made to the deity.¹³ In a third example, taken from the twelfth century Assyrian building inscriptions, the king Assur-nadin-apli made a vow when the floods of Tigris threatened his crops and city. He promised to Assur and Šamaš that he would make and erect images of them if they returned the course of the Tigris to its place.¹⁴

As at Sumer and in biblical psalms, the vow of praise occurs in Akkadian, in hymns of prayer and incantation called *Shu-illa*, 'prayer of the lifting of the hand', and *Ki'utukam*, 'prayer to the rising sun'.¹⁵ The vow of praise may be related to the absolution of sins,¹⁶ or to favours received, and the things vowed include not only praise and proclamation but also concrete things, such as providing and furnishing a house for the deity.¹⁷ Similarly, promises of thanksgiving and praise are routinely accorded for expected favours and ritual purity from the deity in a group of incantations called *dingir-šá-dib-ba* ('appeasing the wrath of a god').¹⁸

A number of Assyrian and Babylonian texts speak of the gods being angry with unpaid or delayed vows. Prompt payment of vows was expected: 'do not by any means neglect the votive offering which you pledged to DN, the goddess is angry';¹⁹ and worshippers were commanded not to 'alter their words', implying that any exchange was

¹⁰ CAD (7: 62-66). Cf. Heb קָרַב in Lev 27:9.

¹¹ CAD (7: 64); Cartledge (1992: 77).

¹² Harris (1960: 128ff.).

¹³ Cf. Harris (1960: 136).

¹⁴ Weidner (1930-31: 14); RLAC (9: 1058); Cartledge (1992: 90).

¹⁵ From about 1400-1300 BC, Dalglish (1962: 19).

¹⁶ Dalglish (1962: 31,41,47); Cartledge (1992: 81); cf. Pss 51:14; 13:6; 54:7.

¹⁷ Cartledge (1992: 82). Cf. Jacob's vow.

¹⁸ Lambert (1974: 275,277); cf. Ps 51:7,8.

¹⁹ CAD (7: 64,65).

unacceptable.²⁰ Several letters of the Old Assyrian period reveal that sickness was sometimes attributed to the gods who were angered by unpaid vows. A child's restlessness at its mother's breast, for instance, was believed to have been caused by a deity whose votive gifts were unpaid. Similarly two women, Tariš-matum and Belatum, came to realise through diviners that their father's house was devastated by sickness because the gods were angry about their unpaid vows, and they made arrangements for the vow to be paid immediately.²¹

These examples demonstrate that vow-making and votive offerings were well-known among kings and common people, and were an important part of private and public religious life in ancient Mesopotamia. Cartledge comments appropriately: 'Although the *ikribu* does not always function in the same way as the Hebrew vow, it often has much in common with its Hebrew counterpart, including similar life situations (distress), locations (the sanctuary), literary forms (prayer, especially lament), contents (temple offerings, public praise), and regulations (vows are sacred and must not be withheld).'²²

6.2.2. Egyptian vows

There are no clear examples of vows in the literature of the Old Kingdom (c. 2650-2135 BC),²³ and examples cited from the Middle Kingdom (c. 2040-1650 BC) are dubious. The promise of the 'ship-wrecked sailor' is sometimes regarded as a vow, but wrongly, since the sailor promises to offer gifts and offerings for protection and kindness already received, and it is not certain whether he regards the snake to whom he makes promises as a god.²⁴ Similarly the 'eloquent peasant' makes a promise when he was robbed and beaten on his way to Egypt.²⁵ Cartledge considers this a vow,²⁶ but this is hardly appropriate, since there is no specific promise to the deity, and the promise is for the peasant himself. This is more a distress call than a vow.

Evidence of specific vows is found on the votive stelae of the New Kingdom (c. 1550-1080 BC). The relevant stelae were recovered at the modern village of Deir el-Medina in the area of Thebes. A draftsman, Nebre, made the votive stele in accordance with the promise he made to Amun-Re for saving his son Nakhtamun.²⁷ As in Mesopotamia, the

²⁰ CAD (7: 65). Cf. Mal 1:14 ('Cursed be the cheat who ... vows ... to the Lord what is blemished.');

Deut 23:21-23; Num 30:2; Eccl 5:4,5.

²¹ Oppenheim (1956: 221,22); Cartledge (1992: 88,89).

²² Cartledge (1992: 91).

²³ Wilson's (1948: 129,131) claim that some of the promissory oaths of this period can be regarded as vows is dubious. Cf. Cartledge (1992: 91).

²⁴ Lichtheim (1975: 214).

²⁵ Lichtheim (1975: 171).

²⁶ Cartledge (1992: 92-93).

²⁷ We have considered this example in connection with 'thanksgiving prayer' in 3.2. above.

view that the vow must be fulfilled without alteration comes out clearly in this inscription: 'So I said to you and you listened to me. Now behold, I do what I have said.'²⁸

As in Mesopotamia, a number of Egyptian prayers and laments from c. 1350-1250 BC contain specific promises of praise.²⁹ Egyptian literature from later periods also contains conditional promises to deities, which suggests that the practice of vow making was common to all periods of its history.

6.2.3. Hittite vows

Vow making is frequently attested in the Hittite literature, but it appears to be more common among the royalty than the ordinary people.³⁰ A vow of common people is found in an elaborate ritual text called the 'Ritual Against Impotence', where the priestess performed a ritual on behalf of the impotent person. She promised that the patient, if healed, would give the deity a shrine, cattle, his sons and daughters as male and female servants to provide continually for his sacrifices,³¹ total allegiance,³² worship, sacrificial vessels and a stone pillar³³ or a statue.³⁴ One can see both Jacob's and Hannah's vows paralleled in this vow.

The best known example among the royal Hittite vows is the vow of Puduhepas, a Hurrian queen, who makes a vow on behalf of her husband Hattusilis III (c. 1275-1250 BC) who was critically ill. The prayer and vow are directed to a number of deities, but especially to Lelwanis, the patron deity of Hattusilis.³⁵ She promised to the deities life-size silver statues of the king, ornaments and golden shields.³⁶ In both these examples the conditional nature of the promise is as clear as in biblical vows.

6.2.4. Ugaritic vows

The best known example of vow making in Ugaritic is preserved in the epic of Keret.³⁷ This vow has many similarities with both the ancient Near Eastern and the Hebrew practice of making vows. According to Parker, the vow's structure and content bear many parallels with the narrative vows in the Hebrew Bible.³⁸ The conditional

²⁸ Lichtheim (1976: 107).

²⁹ Assmann (1975: 363); cf. Cartledge (1992: 97).

³⁰ Cartledge (1992: 100) thinks that this was because the royalty had both the means of commissioning inscriptions and the desire to publish their piety.

³¹ Cf. Hannah's vow and Samuel's vocation.

³² The text mentions elsewhere that this individual did not know this god before, which in itself was an incentive to the deity to grant his request.

³³ Cf. Jacob's vow.

³⁴ *ANET* (349,350).

³⁵ We have considered this prayer in connection with the 'intercessory prayer' in 3.2. For a comprehensive discussion of the background and history of queen Puduhepas, see Fontaine (1987: 95-126).

³⁶ *ANET* (394); cf. Cartledge (1992: 102,103).

³⁷ KTU 1.14.iv.34-43.

³⁸ Parker (1979: 693-700).

protasis is introduced by *hm* (cf. *'im* in Hebrew) and contains imperfect verbs (cf. imperfect or perfect consecutive in Hebrew), and is followed by an apodosis stating the promise, in which the first person singular imperfect is used (cf. imperfect in Hebrew).³⁹ The vow reads:⁴⁰

he came to the sanctuary of Athirat of the two Tyres
and to (the sanctuary of) Elat of the Sidonians.
There the noble Keret vowed, (saying):
'As surely as Athirat of the two Tyres
'and Elat of the Sidonians exists,⁴¹
'if I may take Huray (into) my house,
'introduce the lass to my court,
'I will give twice her (weight) in silver
'and thrice her (weight) in gold.'

The most significant difference from the biblical vows is that the word *ndr* occurs here for the promise of the deity Athirat. As Cartledge notes, 'In the Hebrew Bible, Yahweh makes conditional promises to Israel in the form of a vow, but *ndr* is never used.'⁴² As in Mesopotamia and Egypt, the gods expect that vows made must be fulfilled. It appears that Keret forgot his vow and was afflicted with sickness. Athirat says, 'Has Keret ... broken his vow? Then I shall break...'⁴³ The text is broken here, but the context suggests that some revenge was in view.⁴⁴ This is also reflected in a ritual text where the Ugaritians were advised to make vows to Baal when they were in danger of enemy attack. The text records both the vow of worship, sacrifices and tithes, and also a promise of fulfilment.⁴⁵ Apparently, magical results were expected in this ritual.⁴⁶ These two texts indicate not only that *ndr* is used for a conditional promise in Ugaritic but also that making vows is important in the religion at Ugarit.

6.2.5. Other ancient Near Eastern vows

Examples of vow making also occur in Aramaic, Phoenician and Punic inscriptions, and the epigraphic evidence goes well into the Greek period,⁴⁷ which

³⁹ Parker (1979: 693-96); cf. Cartledge (1992: 111,115).

⁴⁰ *CML* (87f.); cf. *ANET* (145); *UL* (72).

⁴¹ Fisher (1975: 147,152) insists that the original should read here *itt*, 'gift' and not 'exist' or 'live'. It is a noun that goes with the verb 'to vow', thus the translation is 'there the noble Keret vowed a gift ...'. So also Cartledge (1992: 109,10).

⁴² Cartledge (1992: 113; cf. 109-15).

⁴³ KTU 1.15.iii:28f.

⁴⁴ Keret did fall sick later, but since the story's attention directs to his healing, and since the vow does not occur in the story again, some scholars think that the vow was a later insertion to account for Keret's illness, and the vow's absence in the later part of the story was because the narrator did not want to show that El was the cause of Keret's sickness. Parker (1977: 163-67). But Cartledge (1992: 109) thinks that the vow was integral to the narrative.

⁴⁵ For full text see ch. 2 n. 68; Cartledge (1992: 117,18).

⁴⁶ Margalit (1986: 62,63) sees a similar allusion in 2 Ki 3:27.

⁴⁷ Cartledge (1992: 122,33).

suggests that the concept was known in other Semitic cultures as well. It will suffice for our purpose to take a single example from the inscriptions to make our point here. An Aramaic inscription (9th/8th century BC⁴⁸) states that Bar-Hadad, king of Aram, erected a stele he vowed for his lord Melqart because the latter heard his prayer.⁴⁹

6.3. Vows in Israel

The most common term used to designate a 'vow' or 'votive offering' in the Hebrew Bible is the root נָדַר, which occurs 91 times, 49 times in the Pentateuch alone.⁵⁰ However, no text attempts to define vow making and there are only five recorded vows. Nevertheless, the pentateuchal legislation on vows, the different contexts in which the concept occurs and the actual recorded vows give sufficient information to understand their nature and religious ethos in Israel.

6.3.1. Nature of biblical vows

As in the ANE, vows in the Bible always took place in the context of prayer but not necessarily of the cult. Thus vows, like prayer, could be made informally, but their fulfilment always involved cultic rituals. Of the five recorded vows in the Bible,⁵¹ only Hannah's was made at a cult centre. While Jonah made his vow in the fish's belly, the sailors made theirs while aboard ship, and the exiled Israelites in Egypt probably in their homes (Jer 44:25). Most Israel^{ites} made their vows at home (Num 30:1-17).

As in the ANE, vows in Israel generally arose in times of distress. For instance Absalom made his during his self-imposed exile in Geshur (2 Sam 13:38). Many unspectacular vows were probably made in ordinary life and fulfilled during annual feasts (Lev 23:38; 1 Sam 1:21; Nah 2:1).⁵²

As in the ANE, vows in Israel were usually conditional promises to God, even if many psalms do not state conditions explicitly.⁵³ The promise was the basic element of both vows and oaths. It strengthened an earlier petition to the deity in the former, and was reinforced by the addition of a curse, usually in conjunction with an appeal to a deity (e.g. 1 Sam 3:17; 2 Ki 6:31), in the latter.⁵⁴ It is uncertain, however, whether a clear distinction

⁴⁸ For varied views on date and identity of the individual in the inscription, see Cartledge (1992: 123-27).

⁴⁹ Albright (1942: 23,24); *TSSI* (2:3).

⁵⁰ The nominal form occurs 60 times, 34 times in the Pentateuch.

⁵¹ Jacob's vow is the most elaborate. Israel's vow (Num 21:2), the shortest, deals with the things 'devoted' (חֵרֶם) to Yahweh, and Jephthah's (Judg 11:30,39) with an unspecified votive object. Hannah's vow (1 Sam 1:11) is related to the Nazirite vows, and Absalom's (2 Sam 15:7,8) reflects a past crisis.

⁵² Cf. Cartledge (1992: 12,13).

⁵³ Pss 50:14; 76:11; *THAT* (2: 41,42); contrast *TWAT* (5: 264-66); Cartledge (1992: 64,65).

⁵⁴ Cartledge (1992: 16,17).

existed between vows, oaths and promises in Israel. Sometimes what were clearly declarative statements or promises of Yahweh were later regarded as sure oaths (e.g. 2 Sam 7:11,12,16; cf. Pss 89:4,5; 132:11), and what may have been an oath was later described as vow (Ps 132:1-5).⁵⁵ Similarly, the distinction between vows and oaths is blurred in Num 30, where both are described as ‘binding obligations’ to be meticulously fulfilled or to be cancelled by father/husband. Thus some scholars propose that at one time they were regarded as the same thing,⁵⁶ while others differentiate between an earlier and a later usage of *ndr*, a positive oath (e.g. Jephthah’s), and *’sr*, a negative oath (e.g. a Nazirite’s).⁵⁷ The former view is possible, but the latter is unlikely. In Num 6, the idea of ‘binding oneself’, *’issār*, is not used, and restrictions are imposed on the Nazirite not by himself but by law. On the other hand, in Num 30 where *’issār* is used (only here in the OT) a Nazirite vow does not seem to be the issue, and the restrictions imposed are not by law but by the vow maker.

However, the majority of scholars view vows as conditional promises. This is confirmed by the form and content of the five recorded vows of the Bible. They portray a similar structure, consisting of introduction, condition (protasis) and promise (apodosis).⁵⁸ Some are elaborate, others simple. Hannah’s vow (1 Sam 1:11), which also includes an address to the deity, may be taken to illustrate the structure of a biblical vow:

Introduction:	And she vowed a vow and she said,
(Address to the deity:	O [Yahweh] of hosts,
Condition (protasis):	If thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thy maidservant, and remember me, and not forget your maidservant, but wilt give to thy maidservant a son,
Promise (apodosis):	then I will give him to [Yahweh] all the days his life, and no razor shall touch his head.

The condition is the heart of the vow. Some scholars think that vows are bargains with deity and are of inferior religious quality.⁵⁹ Others argue that conditional vows gradually gave way to unconditional vows and eventually lost all religious content, becoming simple solemn promises, the equivalent of oaths.⁶⁰ Though certainty is difficult the different form of several vows in poetry relieves the tension between the condition and promise, leaving the vow account in mere imperative and indicative statements as in Job 22:27 and Ps 61:9. Sometimes the vow is unmentioned but the concept is quite explicit, as in Ps 22:21,22. Interestingly, Keret’s vow considered above has a similar structure with the condition made explicit. Therefore the vows in the psalms lack a conditional protasis probably because of their genre, not development of concept. However, the Nazirite vow

⁵⁵ Cartledge (1992: 15) considers this as an oath.
⁵⁶ Noth (1968: 225).
⁵⁷ Snaith (1967: 321).
⁵⁸ Cf. Richter (1967: 22-23); Fisher (1975: 149-50); Parker (1979: 694).
⁵⁹ Heiler (1923: 145); cf. Cartledge (1992: 47).
⁶⁰ Wendel (1931: 13-14); Davies (1962: 792-93).

in Num 6 is a special vow with no conditions, except separation to Yahweh, לחזור ליהוה.⁶¹ In this sense it looks more like an oath than a vow. In the cases of Samson and Samuel, the vows were made not by themselves but by God or parents. The Nazirite law probably arose in later times when individuals wanted to emulate such persons.

6.3.2. Legislation on vows

Legislation on various kinds of vows occurs eleven times in the Hebrew Bible, only in the Pentateuch.⁶² This attention suggests not only a cultic interest in systematising vows but also the importance of vow making in the religious life of Israel.

First, as in the ANE, vows had to be promptly fulfilled, especially since they were voluntary (Deut 18:22-24; Eccles 5:4-5; cf. Num 30:3). However, a woman's vow not approved by her father or husband was annulled (Num 30:4-17).

Secondly, objects vowed in Israel were both general and specific. The former includes free-will offerings (נדב, Lev 22:18), peace offerings or burnt offerings (זבח שלמים, Lev 22:21), a votive offering (נדריים, Lev 22:23,38; Num 29:39; Deut 12:6,11,17,26; cf. Jephthah's vow), sacrifices (זבח, Jonah 2:9), and libations (נסך, Jer 44:25).⁶³ The latter includes persons, sacrificial and non-sacrificial animals, houses, lands and fields, and they became 'holy' to Yahweh (Lev 27:1-29). Although קרב hiphil (vv. 9-13) and קדש (vv. 14-27) cannot be translated as 'vow making' or 'vow',⁶⁴ they seem to be used here synonymously and in some way related to the objects vowed. As in the ANE, abstract praise and even thanksgiving (תודה, Ps 50:14) could also be vowed to Yahweh, as the parallelism between vows and prayers (Job 22:27), praise (Pss 22:26; 61:9; 65:2), thanksgiving (Pss 50:14; 56:13; 116:17,18) and even the 'cup of salvation' (Ps 116:13,14) suggests.

Thirdly, animals vowed could not be exchanged, but anything vowed could be redeemed by adding a fifth to their value, especially persons who could not be sacrificed (Lev 27:2-8). However, cities, humans, animals or inherited land-holdings (Lev 27:28-29) vowed for 'utter destruction' (חרם, Num 21:2), being 'most holy' to Yahweh, could not be redeemed. While no regulation in the ANE prohibited objects from vows, Israel prohibits the 'hire of a harlot or a dog' (Deut 23:19), probably the gains of male and female

⁶¹ *Contra* Cartledge (1992: 23).

⁶² Lev 7:16; 22:18-23; 23:38; 27:2,8; Num 6:2,5,21; 15:3,8; 21:2; 29:39; 30:3-15; Deut 12:6,11,17,26; 23:18-23. Eccl 5:3,4 is a reiteration of Deut 23:22,23 and not a new law.

⁶³ Cf. the exiled Egyptians who vowed 'incense', קטר, to the Queen of Heaven.

⁶⁴ So Cartledge (1992: 137-38). It is interesting to note that the Akkadian *ikribu* that we discussed above has similar meaning to קרב hiphil. Further, קדש appears to be equivalent to a 'vow' in Prov 20:25. In the Jerusalem Talmud this verse is quoted as valid vow (*Nederim* 1:10). Similarly words of swearing, שבוע, and oath-taking, אסר, are associated with נדר in Numbers 21 and 30, and שבוע and נדר are paired together in Ps 132:2.

prostitutes which were often dedicated to deities in non-Israelite worship.⁶⁵ Firstlings also could not be vowed because they already belonged to Yahweh.

Fourthly, the Nazirite vows involved special regulations: abstention from wine, cutting hair and corpse pollution, even following the death of the nearest of kin (Num 6:1-21). Nazirites are comparable only to the high priest in this regard.

Fifthly, the law gives equal opportunities for women worshippers in making vows. But it also makes concessions if they could not fulfil vows immediately disowned by their father/husband (Num 30:6,9,13). However, men who attempted to annul such vows later would bear their guilt.

6.3.3. Comparative analysis

First, it is abundantly clear that vow-making was not peculiar to Israel, but was very common among her neighbours long before Israel ever became a nation.

Secondly, both in Israel and the ANE vows were made in the context of prayer, and in situations of distress, such as sickness, childlessness and danger from natural calamity or enemy attack. Occasionally the problem was individual guilt, as especially in the Babylonian hymns. In Israel, however, there was no instance of a vow or any other promise for an absolution of guilt.

Thirdly, objects vowed in the ANE and in Israel were both material gifts and abstract praise or thanksgiving. However, silver and gold, ornaments, statues, pillars, sun-disks and stelae, which either represent or decorate the images of the gods, were common in the former but not found in the latter. This probably indicates the aniconic nature of Israel's religion.

Fourthly, the only specific law on vows in the ANE concerned prompt fulfilment. The Pentateuch maintains this and also gives various other laws, such as the objects which could not be vowed, the Nazirite vows, the non-exchange of vowed animals and the redemption of persons and objects vowed.

Fifthly, the semantic root used for vow making is general in Akkadian (*krb*) but more specific in Ugaritic (*ndr*). In one Ugaritic text a deity is the subject of *ndr*, in Israel only humans made vows.

6.4. Jacob's vow in the patriarchal narratives

The longest of the five recorded vows in the Bible occurs in the patriarchal narratives, in the Jacob-cycle. Since there are no other examples of vows in the patriarchal

⁶⁵ Driver (1902: 264-65); Wendel (1931: 21); Thomas (1960: 424-26); cf. von Rad (1966: 148); Mays (1979: 320).

narratives, it becomes imperative to compare Jacob’s vow with others in the Bible and the ANE. Our aim is to analyse Jacob’s vow (Gen 28:20-22) in order not only to understand the religious ethos behind it but also to see the similarities and dissimilarities between Jacob’s religion and the Israelite and ancient Near Eastern religions.

6.4.1. Form and structure

With minor variations critics acknowledge that all the narrative accounts of vows in the Hebrew Bible consist of the same basic form and structure: (i) narrative introduction, (ii) address to the deity, (iii) condition (protasis, introduced by *’im* + imperfect verb), and (iv) promise (apodosis, introduced by *waw*-consecutive + perfect verb).⁶⁶ However, the second element is present only in Hannah’s vow and possibly also in Keret’s.⁶⁷ Thus Jacob’s vow may be analysed as follows:

i)	וידר יעקב נדר לאמר	Then Jacob made a vow, saying,
ii)	—	—
iii)	אם־יהיה אלהים עמדי ושמרני בדרך הזה אשר אכי הולך ונתתלי לחם לאכל ובגד ללבוש ושבתי בשלום אל־בית אבי	‘If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace,
iv)	והיה יהוה לי לאלהים והאבן הזאת אשר־שמתי מצבה יהיה בית אלהים וכל אשר תתתלי עשר אעשרנו לך	then ‘Yahweh’ shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar shall be God’s house; and of all that you givest me I will give the tenth to thee.

The first element appears to be more a matter of choice than a fixed form even though it is relatively uniform in all other vows. A report of a vow must introduce it in the third person, though with Absalom’s vow the author chooses to report it in Absalom’s words (2 Sam 15:8). Thus this was not necessarily a fixed introductory formula. Similarly the second point, address to the deity, does not occur in Jacob’s vow, though it does in Hannah’s and in Keret’s vows. While the *protasis* is common to all narrative vows, there are real differences among them. Jacob’s vow uses the third person, ‘If God...’, while Israel’s, Jephthah’s and Hannah’s vow use the second person, ‘If you...’, and Keret’s vow uses the first person, ‘If I ...’. Parker’s suggestion⁶⁸ that the first person form in Keret’s vow is influenced by marriage language may apply also to the biblical vows, especially Hannah’s, where the protasis is long and the repetition of ‘your maid’ emphasises her humble situation. Similar language is used in the protasis of Puduhepas’ vow. Similarly, the precise conditions presented in the protasis of Jacob’s vow were probably due partly to his insecurity and uncertain future and partly to his character as

⁶⁶ Cartledge (1992: 160); cf. Richter (1967: 22-23); Fisher (1975: 149-50); de Pury (1975: 436-37); Parker (1979: 693-96). For discussion of the structure of other narrative vows in the Bible, see Cartledge (1992: 143-50).

⁶⁷ Keret’s vow follows a similar structure, see 6.2.4. above.

⁶⁸ Parker (1979: 392-96)

‘trickster’ as portrayed by the narrator.⁶⁹ Since this leads us into the larger structure of Jacob’s vow, it is instructive to note that no vow can be studied in isolation. The larger structure of the story plays its part.⁷⁰ The structure is not uniform in the *apodosis* either. Keret’s vow, like Israel’s, does not mention a divine name but only the promised gift, while all others mention in the third person the deity to whom the promise was made. Here again Jacob’s vow is different, in that it starts with the third person and then changes to the second person.

Thus we cannot lay out a neat structure into which every form can be fitted. The first two elements are more erratic than the last two. While the former are more a matter of authorial choice, the latter probably arose from the language of social bargain in which condition and promise play an important role - bargainers exchange what they have for what they want. Cartledge rightly points out that ‘any person who knew how to make a bargain could also make a vow without consulting a common repository of vow-forms for the most appropriate type.’⁷¹ Thus it is unlikely that the relative consistency in the form of the vows necessarily suggests, as Richter argued, that there were ‘fixed forms’ of vows in stock available at certain cult places for the worshippers to use in times of need.⁷² However, this form is relevant only for narrative vows. The vows that appear in poetic parts of the Bible and in a Ugaritic ritual text have no conditional protasis or apodosis, but only imperative and indicative statements.⁷³ Sometimes the vow is not even mentioned, yet conditionality is explicit.⁷⁴ Thus the present form of Jacob’s vow is more a ‘literary adaptation’ than a ‘transcript’ of the actual vow,⁷⁵ and not necessarily more distorted in form than other narrative vows.⁷⁶ This does not mean, however, that the vow is secondary to its present context.⁷⁷

6.4.2. Content

The biblical narrative vows deal with repatriation (Jacob, Absalom), military victory (Israel, Jephthah, cf. the Ugaritic community) and childlessness (Hannah, cf. Keret).⁷⁸ Fisher thinks that the purpose of Jacob’s and Keret’s vows was to obtain a wife,⁷⁹ but this is not explicit in Jacob’s vow, and is only a secondary interest in Keret’s. Parker’s view that Hannah’s and Keret’s vows have closer parallels than Jacob’s and Keret’s is plausible,

⁶⁹ Cf. Cartledge (1992: 149-50).

⁷⁰ De Pury (1975: 435-36); cf. Richter (1967: 47-50); Cartledge (1992: 166-74).

⁷¹ Cartledge (1992: 150).

⁷² *Contra* Richter (1967: 26-30,31); Westermann (1985: 459).

⁷³ See 6.3.1. above.

⁷⁴ Cf. Cartledge (1992: 150-61).

⁷⁵ Cartledge (1992: 144).

⁷⁶ *Contra* Parker (1979: 698).

⁷⁷ De Pury (1975: 435-37); *contra* Richter (1967: 44-49).

⁷⁸ Parker (1979: 699).

⁷⁹ Fisher (1975: 149-50).

since both were concerned with children, and the promise made in return was an offer of persons, although in Keret's case the silver and gold of the person's weight was probably a redemption of the person vowed. In this sense the vow of Puduhepas was similar since her promised gift was also a substitute for the person.⁸⁰ On the other hand Jacob's vow is similar to Absalom's because the concern in both was a safe return from abroad, and the promise made was of worship.⁸¹

However, we are bound to be disappointed if we expect . . . parallels between these vows, since each situation is different. Hannah's desire for a son was not so much to continue her clan as to relieve her from the shame of barrenness, whereas Keret's concern was only posterity, so they are not strictly the same. The only real parallel of content is the promise of persons, if we take the silver and gold of person's weight as substitute for the person. But we cannot be certain that Keret and Puduhepas meant it in this way. Instead, it could indicate that they valued the person so much that they would rather part with silver and gold than with the person. Some of the things promised in Jacob's vow can be seen in other ancient Near Eastern vows. In a vow from the Neo-Sumerian period a woman promised to build a house to the goddess and serve before her. In Akkadian vows from the Old Babylonian period vow makers promised to provide for the deity's house and furnish its enclosures. In a Hittite vow the 'Arzawa woman' promised on behalf of the impotent man a place and a house for the deity and to set up a stone pillar or a statue. In Ugaritic vows, apart from Keret's, promises included tithes to Baal.⁸² Shrine and money seem to be the commonest things vowed to gods.

Jacob's vow, however, is concerned as much with the condition as with the promise. Jacob sought God's protection, provision and safe return, all of which may be summed up in the first sentence of the protasis, 'If God will be with me'. In return, he offered to raise a sanctuary and pay tithes for the deity's patronage, all of which may be summed up in the first sentence of the apodosis, 'then Yahweh will be my God'.⁸³ The parallels suggest that Jacob was no different from any worshipper in the ANE in offering a shrine, a pillar and a tithe. It appears that Jacob was more aware of the general religious customs in Mesopotamia and Canaan than were his forbears. Abraham encountered childlessness, war and famine resulting in travel to Egypt and back, but in none of these occasions did he make a vow, although he did pray for an heir. He paid tithes from the booty to Melchizedek, but there is no indication that he had vowed to do this. Similarly, there is no mention of tithes or vows in the Isaac cycle, although he also was childless and prayed for his barren wife, and was forced out of Canaan by famine.

⁸⁰ Cf. Parker (1979: 694-95), who also cites an example from the Mishnah where a woman vows a gift equal in value to her sick daughter if she recovers.

⁸¹ Cf. Parker (1979: 699).

⁸² See examples in 5.2.3. above.

⁸³ Cf. Cartledge (1992: 149).

6.4.3. Function

Richter's view, that all the biblical narrative vows except Jacob's reflect the form of personal piety attested in early and later monarchical times,⁸⁴ is possible. But this need not mean that such pious practice was unknown in pre-monarchic or patriarchal times. The parallels from the ANE clearly prove it was. The final authors of Israel's and Jephthah's vows assume this, despite the uncertainty of the time of the origin of these texts. Further, neither the situation in which they vowed (e.g. battle), nor the things they vowed (e.g. humans, livestock) were uncommon in the ANE (cf. Ugaritic community). We cannot prove this, but neither can we deny such a possibility. Richter's second premise is that Jacob's vow, unlike other narrative vows, has an overarching theological function in its present context. It is part of the 'vow-scheme' along with Gen 31:2,4-16, which echoes the granting, and 35:1-5,7, which echoes the fulfilling of the vow, though neither of these is a unified narrative.⁸⁵ However, this appears like a circular argument. Richter's assumption that the vow was a secondary insertion in its present context necessitates similar assumptions about the other passages. Moreover, as de Pury notes:

The fact that the significance of the vow transcends its immediate narrative context is insufficient to establish the secondary character of the vow. The presence of the vow, just like that of promise, simply shows that the account of Gen 28 does not subsist as an isolated 'story' which unfolded entirely outside of time and space. As for the 'structuring' function of the vow, it shows us that the account of Jacob's dream could only be understood in the framework of a more extended cycle of account.⁸⁶

Further, the vow may not necessarily be the overarching theme of the Jacob cycle. For Fishbane it is 'birth', 'blessing' and 'land', set in tension with their opposites 'barrenness', 'curse' and 'exile', that charge the whole of ^{the} Jacob cycle. These themes are of fundamental significance to each of the narrative cycles of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.⁸⁷ For Westermann genealogies and itineraries form the framework not only for the whole of the Jacob cycle but also for the Abraham cycle, and the Jacob cycle is especially characterised by the familiar structure of 'flight-return'.⁸⁸ Thus the overarching theme could be 'blessing', 'promise' or 'land'. It is tempting to see it as 'promise', since God's promises to be with Jacob and to bring him back to his father's land, the conditions of Jacob's vow (vv. 20,21), were already stated in the dream (v. 15), and they are echoed in the same passages in which the vow is echoed (31:3,5; 35:3). So Richter's contention, that vow must form the overarching structure of ^{the} Jacob cycle because it is echoed in these passages, loses its force.

⁸⁴ Richter (1967: 26).

⁸⁵ Richter (1967: 44-49).

⁸⁶ De Pury (1975: 435-36).

⁸⁷ Fishbane (1979: 60-61).

⁸⁸ Westermann (1985: 406-407).

6.4.4. Fulfilment

Gen 35:1-7, which belongs to E according to traditional source analysis, describes the fulfilment of Jacob's vow. Richter and Cartledge argue that these verses, along with 31:2,4-16, are connected with 28:20-22 and cannot be regarded as an independent unit of tradition. The chief reason for their contention is that the making (28:20-22), granting (31:2,4-16) and fulfilment (35:1-7) of the vow do not occur in the same narrative, as is usual with other vows.⁸⁹ Hannah's and Absalom's vows, which also have deferred fulfilment, are allowed as exceptions.

There are several important observations. First, as has been noted above, the making of vow in 28:20-22 was not an insertion in the narrative. As de Pury has argued, the vow fits well with the situation of Jacob, who was in distress and running away from his brother who intended to kill him because of his double deception. On his way he received an unexpected revelation in which the deity promised land, offspring, increase and blessing, in reiteration of earlier promises to Abraham and Isaac, besides protection and safe return, of particular relevance to Jacob. Jacob takes up only the last two aspects of the promise and adds another condition, that of food and clothes, and then binds the deity with a vow. This fits well with the uncertain future Jacob was to face. So there is nothing illogical about the vow's occurrence in the dream story.⁹⁰ Interestingly, de Pury's explanation is clearly also the perspective of the final author.

Secondly, 'the granting of the vow' in 31:2,4-16, in contrast to that of other biblical narrative vows, is not as clear as Richter and Cartledge think. Elsewhere the conditions were often straightforward, such as victory (Israel, Jephthah), children (Hannah) and safe return (Absalom). All except Absalom's are specific and time-bound. Their situation required one event before their fulfilment followed. Similarly, the vows of the ANE we considered above were all concerned with immediate circumstances, such as sickness, childlessness, flood or attack of the enemy. Thus it becomes easier to assess their divine fulfilment than it is with Jacob's vow. In contrast Jacob's vow, even though concerned with specific conditions such as safe keeping, food and clothing and safe return, neither is time-bound nor anticipates a single event. Strictly speaking, the content of its protasis cannot be compared with other biblical or ancient Near Eastern vows, although it shares with them several elements of its apodosis such as pillar, house for God and tithes. Further, Gen 31 seems to be concerned also with Jacob's providing for his own family (30:30), which was not part of the conditions of his vow. It appears that Jacob wanted to return home at this point of the narrative (30:26), and the conditions he laid in his vow would still have been fulfilled if he had done so. Jacob had promised a tithe from what God would give him. So it is not necessary to suppose that tithing was inserted in the vow in

⁸⁹ Richter (1967: 26-31); Cartledge (1992: 172-73).

⁹⁰ Cf. de Pury (1975: 438).

order to account for the possessions he acquired in Paddan-aram, or *vice versa*. Jacob's unscrupulous methods to achieve his ends during his employment by Laban led to the accusation of his brothers-in-law that he took away all their property (31:1). In 31:10-16 it appears that Jacob was trying to justify his actions before his wives by claiming divine sanction. The indirect and direct references to the vow (31:12,13) appear to blend well with the narrative, with no suggestion that these passages are secondary to the narrative. Therefore the assumption that this passage reflects 'the granting of the vow' in the overarching function of the vow in the Jacob-cycle, is unconvincing. Moreover, there is no consensus over whether 35:1-7 belongs to the same author as 28:20-22 and 31:2,4-16, as Richter and Cartledge claim, since most modern authors find no E material there.⁹¹ In any case, it is impossible to be certain about the intention of the Elohist just as it is impossible to be certain about the extent of his material. So it is safer to look for the intention of the final redactor, despite the obvious seams between the traditions.

This leads us to the third point against Richter's contention that Gen 35:1-7 is part of the overarching vow structure anticipated in 28:20-22. This is not convincing because the vow is only vaguely reflected here. If it was the author's intention to show that this was the decisive point in Jacob's story where the vow needs to be fulfilled, he would have stated it clearly. The place in the narrative where one would expect the fulfilment of the vow to be related is after 33:18, where Jacob's safe arrival at Shechem is described. Bethel could easily have been substituted for Shechem and the theme of fulfilment would have fitted well, since Jacob had now safely returned and had been delivered particularly from the feared revenge of his brother from whom he originally fled to Paddan-aram. However, the final author did not rearrange the received traditions in this way. According to him, Jacob settled down at Shechem on his arrival from Paddan-aram. Having acquired some land, Jacob probably stayed for a long period at Shechem until he was forced to leave after the massacre of the Shechemites.⁹² At this crucial point God commands Jacob to move to Bethel specifically to worship the God who had appeared to him there when he fled from his brother. It was not explicitly in order to fulfil his vow, although it is possible that Jacob did fulfil it along with the sacrifices on the altar he built there, but neither this nor the payment of his tithes is clearly stated. This was probably because there was no sanctuary or priests to appropriate these things in a manner fitting to the rituals.

Furthermore, the fact that the fulfilment of Jacob's vow does not occur in the same narrative is not sufficient to prove that 35:1-7 is a later insertion. There are many examples in the ANE where the fulfilment of vows was deferred or delayed and the gods were then angered. Sometimes particular sicknesses were attributed to this. Certainly the fulfilment of

⁹¹ Cf. Westermann (1985: 548-49); Wenham (1994: 323).

⁹² Jacob's children were relatively young when they arrived, but were adults when they left Shechem. Cf. 33:23,24 and 34:25,27.

Keret's vow does not occur in the immediate narrative.⁹³ In fact, Keret had completely forgotten about it. We do not know if he honoured his vow at all, since the text where this occurs is irretrievably broken. It is clear from the story that the goddess to whom he vowed waited for at least seven years, during which Keret's wife bore sons and daughters to him, before taking revenge by afflicting him with serious illness, but the story's attention thereafter diverts to the healing of the hero rather than the fulfilment of the vow.⁹⁴ In any case, it is clear that we have at least one extra-biblical example where the fulfilment of the vow was not part of the same narrative.

Therefore, apart from the fact that the fulfilment of the vow is not stated in 35:1-7, the passage follows a logical sequence of events in the narrative. It is possible that the author intended to show that Jacob's return to Bethel was to fulfil his vow. But it is strange that he does not make this explicit. Neither is there an allusion to the vow. Instead, the situation of Jacob's flight from home and his encounter with God at Bethel are mentioned twice in this passage with a command to make an altar, and Jacob's implicit obedience to it: 'make there an altar to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau... and there he built an altar... because there God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother' (vv. 1,7). Mention of Jacob's flight from his brother is probably appropriate here because Jacob now faces a similar danger to his life from the neighbourhood of Shechem. The author is more concerned to show how Jacob escaped from his near annihilation than to state whether he fulfilled his vow. Another possibility is that the author believed that the patriarchs lived in a society in which they had no priests or sanctuaries. The author of the Bethel story (28:10-22) certainly denies any sacred associations to the place prior to Jacob's encounter with God there. Therefore it is only logical for him not to mention the vow's fulfilment which involved erecting a shrine and paying tithes, both of which envisage an established cult. Instead, the author records that Jacob built an altar and worshipped God in the same way his fathers had done. We have already discussed the reasons and the purpose of patriarchal altars in 2.4. Accordingly, Jacob's situation at Bethel suggests once again that there were no altars existing at the place where he built his altar, and the purpose was probably that of offering thanksgiving or votive sacrifices. Thus Jacob's vow, while sharing some common elements in form and content with ancient Near Eastern and Israelite vows, is distinct in the aspect of its fulfilment, but it is compatible with the patriarchal nomadic lifestyle and family oriented religion.

⁹³ Cf. *ANET* (145,146); *CML* (82-94).

⁹⁴ Cf. Cartledge (1992: 112-14).

6.5. Conclusion

It is clear from the second and first millennium ancient Near Eastern and Israelite sources that the practice of vow making was very ancient and continued through the ages with little or no change in form, setting, content or function. Though the basic form of vows is the same in all these cultures, there is a rich variety in the choice of words both for the vow maker and the narrator. The vow language was probably borrowed from the social and business transaction of the bargain, and any one who could bargain could also make vows without looking for an appropriate form. Vows were usually made in times of crisis, at home or at a sanctuary, and were expected to be fulfilled at the sanctuary. Deferred or delayed vows attracted the anger or displeasure of the deity, and sometimes the god sent disease. However, the elaborate legislation on vows in Israel was unique in the ANE where there was hardly any legislation, except for the common expectation that vows once made must be fulfilled.

In the light of this evidence, it is reasonable to assume that the patriarchs were aware of the practice of vow making. Their nomadic lifestyle does not necessarily deny them the knowledge of such a practice among the sedentary people with whom they often came in contact. The fact that vows are not recorded for Abraham or Isaac suggests that they did not use the practice, although they encountered crises such as childlessness, enforced travel and war. Abraham and Isaac reportedly prayed concerning their childlessness, and when abroad used other ploys such as passing off their wives as sisters. By contrast, Jacob does not pray when his beloved wife Rachel was found to be barren (29:31), although he knew that it was God who 'withheld the fruit of the womb' (30:3). However, he chose to bargain with God when he faced an uncertain future. This kind of piety suited his character well and Jacob used the conditional promises in vows to his own advantage, although they are perfectly normal in vows among all cultures. The narrative had previously recorded that Jacob was a trickster and bargained his brother's birthright for lentil stew (25:33). Despite Esau's willingness to part with his birthright, Jacob wanted to make sure that Esau would not go back on his word, so he made him swear before giving him the food. Similarly Jacob binds God with a vow, although God had already promised more than Jacob required in the vow. Therefore Jacob's vow was a matter of his choice, in conformity with his character portrayed in the narrative. However, the narrator was more concerned with Jacob's escape from Shechem than his fulfilment of the vow. Or he was deliberately vague, if not silent, about the fulfilment of his vow, probably because it involved an established cult and priests which are incompatible with the patriarchal religion and lifestyle that he had portrayed thus far. Therefore Jacob's vow was only partially fulfilled, in that he offered worship and pledged his loyalty to the God who had been with him, but he did not pay tithes or raise a sanctuary.

Chapter 7

Pollution and Purity

7.1 Introduction

The last of the patriarchal religious practices we are concerned with is the idea of purification. Like vow making, the concept of ritual purity occurs only in the Jacob cycle, and like tithes and vows, it is a voluntary action of the patriarch. Neither cult nor cultic regulations were involved in the patriarch's action. This is further suggested by the patriarch's assumption as the sole officiant in the ritual. Thus we hope to show that, like tithes and vows, the idea of patriarchal ritual purity is distinct from that of the ANE and Israel and compatible only with the religion and lifestyle of the patriarch.

We have only one clear instance of purification in the patriarchal stories, in Gen 35:1-5. Jacob exhorts his family members to put away the foreign gods that were with them, purify themselves and change their clothes before they go to worship the God who has been guiding Jacob in his journeys thus far. Jacob's exhortation presupposes that he and his family members have been in a state of defilement or uncleanness, and that it is inappropriate to meet with this God in that state. The consequent actions of his family members imply that they were following a custom or a religious ritual familiar in Mesopotamia and probably also in Canaan, and that a belief system or a world view lay behind that custom or ritual in which a state of uncleanness and cleanness, purity and acceptance were more or less defined. But it is equally possible that this belief system or world view partly reflects the ideas of the Genesis author(s),¹ who wanted to characterise Jacob as contaminated by the idolatry of Mesopotamia. A purification ritual was thus in order before he entered the promised land.

Apart from this, we have a number of references to death and mourning in the patriarchal stories.² Although there are no explicit statements about purification following death, it is possible that some of these instances involved such rites. The aim of this chapter is to investigate the ancient Near Eastern and the Priestly backgrounds for the ideas of purity and impurity, and thereby see how these backgrounds enlighten our knowledge of the religion of the patriarchs.

¹ According to traditional source analysis portions of Genesis (including Gen 35:2-4), Exodus and Numbers, all of Leviticus and a small part of Deuteronomy belong to P. Cf. Eissfeldt (1965: 155-241); Fohrer (1970: 103-92); Rendtorff (1985: 131-64).

² Cf. 7.4.1. below.

7.2. Pollution and purity in the ancient Near East

The idea of purity in the ANE is hard to define. Though this is the fundamental concept in many ancient religions, no one knows how far this goes back into a non-literate culture.³ Sometimes it is argued that primitive peoples make little distinction between sacredness and uncleanness so that 'the sacred is at once "sacred" and "defiled".'⁴ This apparent contradiction will be resolved when we examine the various ideas about purity and defilement in the ANE.⁵

7.2.1. Assyrian and Babylonian sources

The various words associated with purity also occur in texts of healing rituals, exorcisms and even legal freedom. Four Akkadian words, *ellu*, *ebbu*, *namru* and *zakû*, denote different aspects of purity. *Ellu* primarily denotes cleanliness in the sense of brilliance, luminosity or absence from dirt. It is used of both secular and cultic objects,⁶ and in legal contexts of freedom of slaves, and of real estates,⁷ but never physical cleanliness.⁸ Similarly, *Ebbu* describes glittering precious stones, lustrous surface quality of metals, stones and wood.⁹ It also refers to trustworthy people, but mostly to deities, ritual animals and objects in a cultic sense.¹⁰

While *namru* describes materials, artefacts, stars and gods as 'bright' and 'shiny', and of humans as 'healthy' and 'whole',¹¹ *zaku* refers to liquids and sky as 'clear', and to garments and humans as 'clean' and 'in good order'.¹² *Zaku* also refers to the freedom of persons and merchandise in legal contexts.¹³ Sometimes the verbal form, *zukkû*, refers to ritual cleaning or washing of impurities.¹⁴ Both *namru* and *zakû* are contrasted with *ešû*, 'gloomy, dull', and *dalhu*, 'blurred', 'muddy'.¹⁵ Some of these words are also used in various exorcisms and healing rituals. The variety of ways these words are used suggest that there is enough flexibility with the words to apply to any kind of ailment, physical, psychological or spiritual, that hinders a person's happy life.¹⁶ In fact the purification often

³ Douglas (1966: 4).

⁴ Eliade (1958: 14-15).

⁵ Cf. Van der Toorn (1985: 27).

⁶ CAD (4: 102-106).

⁷ CAD (4: 105-106).

⁸ CAD (4: 4); cf. van der Toorn (1985: 27,28).

⁹ CAD (4: 1,2,4).

¹⁰ An exception to this is non-cultic garments which are referred to as 'clean, but only in a sense; CAD (4: 3); cf. van der Toorn (1985: 28).

¹¹ CAD (11.1: 239-44).

¹² CAD (21: 23-24).

¹³ CAD (21: 23-24).

¹⁴ CAD (21: 28ff.,32).

¹⁵ van der Toorn (1985: 28); in CAD (21: 26) *zakû* and *dalhu* are contrasted.

¹⁶ Van der Toorn (1985: 28).

mentioned in the various incantations is, strictly speaking, not ritual purification but healing of various kinds. This will become clear as we look at some examples.

Purity of the gods: Gods, kings, priests, their bodies and their activities are often described as sacred in Old Babylonian and Old Assyrian literature. The deities especially are described as pure, with shining light and brilliant face (e.g. Ištar, *ellet* and Ninurta, *elletum*).¹⁷ This is probably because of the anointing oil that was often poured on their images, not to purify them¹⁸ but to give them a shining glow which represented both their happy mood and their strength and vitality.¹⁹ Sometimes the name of the deity is described as holy.²⁰ However, even the gods could be defiled by the evil spirits just like humans, hence they resort to carrying amulets to ward off the demons.²¹ This evidence suggests that a certain idea of purity was ascribed to the gods and the objects associated with them in the ancient Near East, but it is not clear what this purity meant for worshippers in their relationship with the gods or in their daily living.

Purity of the ritual materials: The idea of clean and unclean occurs in relation to not only the abodes and furnishings of the gods but also the cultic objects, materials and animals in cultic use from the Old Assyrian and Old Babylonian periods.²²

The purification of the temple forms an important part of the ritual on the fifth day of the New Year Akitu Festival in Babylonia, in which the *mašmašu*-priest performs a purification ritual. The ritual affirms that god Marduk purifies the temple.²³ Such an idea of purification presupposes that the sanctuaries were inherently holy because the gods dwelt there, and that for some reason they became defiled. This is clearly evident in the Sumerian hymns to Enlil and Šamaš.²⁴

Purity of individuals: The cultic status of individuals is described as clean or unclean depending on their status as priests or laymen. The priests could not serve the gods if deformed in limb, face, eyes teeth or finger, or if he had a sickly look or pimpled face.²⁵ Laymen with ejaculations are described as both impure and carrying a weighty sin, but they could ^{be} purified through rituals.²⁶ Similarly, a menstruating woman is described as unclean.²⁷ The sacrifices are taboo for an unclean person.²⁸ Such ritual language is also used in the Epic of Gilgamesh when Utnapishtim advised the boatman, Urshanabi, to lead

¹⁷ CAD (4: 104,105).

¹⁸ *Contra* Kutsch (1963: 6).

¹⁹ Cf. Veenhof (1966: 309); Meier (1937: 31,32); ANET (97); van der Toorn (1985: 28).

²⁰ Langdon (1927: 16).

²¹ Saggs (1962: 303); cf. Toombs (1962: 643).

²² Occasional references to such ideas can be found from an even earlier period, e.g. in a Sumerian hymn to Enlil-bani dating from 2000 BC or earlier; cf. Langdon (1923a: 15). For examples see Langdon (1927: 27); CAD (4: 3-4, 103-105).

²³ ANET (337-80); cf. Weinfeld (1983: 111-13); Wright (1987: 62-65).

²⁴ ANET (574); cf. Langdon (1927: 50).

²⁵ Contenau (1959: 281,287); cf. CAD (4: 106).

²⁶ CAD (4: 104; cf. 21: 24). It is not certain if this refers to the chronic discharge mentioned in Leviticus.

²⁷ CAD (4: 106).

²⁸ CAD (4: 106); cf. Milgrom (1970: 35).

Gilgamesh to the place of washing before he was given the plant of life.²⁹ As in the Bible, higher standards are required with regard to those serving in the temple, but unlike the Bible, sin is attached to semen ejaculation in Babylon.

Purity and healing: A large number of Akkadian texts refer to healing from various diseases as purification or cleansing. Nearly all of these diseases were believed to stem from evil spirits or sorcery, although they were sometimes attributed to the individual's negligence with regard to certain ritual taboos, e.g. eating tabooed food, eating or drinking from an accursed man or sinner, treading in libation or unclean water, or nail-parings, or shavings from the armpit, or shoes with holes in them, or a tattered belt, or a leather bag with black magic, or scales of a leper;³⁰ casting eye on the water of unwashed hands or touching an accursed man, coming into contact with an unclean or bewitched person.³¹ A series of texts called *utukki limnuiti*,³² the pure 'water of Ea' and the magic power of the tamarisk, the powerful weapon of Anu, were often used in exorcising these evil spirits.³³ Besides, the burning rituals called *Šurpu* (for unknown evils)³⁴ and *Maqlû* (for known evils of witchcraft)³⁵ are performed. The objects given over to fire in these rituals are viewed as carriers of the patient's sins and diseases.³⁶ While the Old Babylonian *lipšurr litanies* are used for moral sins such as murder, adultery and false oaths,³⁷ the Late Assyrian and Late Babylonian *Dingir-ša-dib-ba* incantations³⁸ are used for evils thought to have come from a deity. Although the Akkadian *Namburbi* texts (8th-6th centuries BC) are concerned with the rituals against unsolicited portents (e.g. the presence or actions of a threatened man, strangers, domestic and wild animals, household objects and a limited range of natural phenomena, especially light and fire),³⁹ and the Babylonian 'Prophylactic figures' (8th century BC) with rituals against the attacks of the demons on houses, the idea of purification often features in the rituals.⁴⁰ Thus, by implication, ritual/moral sins, evil spirits/gods and evil portents caused disease which in turn resulted in uncleanness, and

²⁹ ANET (96); cf. CAD (4: 106).

³⁰ Reiner (1956: 137-43); Saggs (1962: 318-20).

³¹ Thompson (1904: 137-39; 1903: 39-49, 51-63); for Sumerian examples, see Langdon (1927: 54).

³² Thompson (1903: xi-xii) dates the ritual texts to the fourth millennium BC, Saggs (1962: 308) to the late third millennium.

³³ Thompson (1903: xlvi, xlix, 19-23). The tamarisk tree appears again and again in the process of cleansing from the evil spirits, see especially pp. 103, 119, 173 and 197; cf. on Ea's magic, *idem* (1904: 21, 107-111; on the tamarisk tree, 63); Saggs (1962: 305).

³⁴ 'Burning' rituals, used mainly to get rid of sins. The sufferer's sins, ritual offences or taboos that were thought to have offended the gods were made over to some object which was then burned. Saggs (1962: 308); Reiner (1958: 1-3).

³⁵ Saggs (1962: 308); Abusch (1974: 251-62); cf. Gurney (1960: 221-27).

³⁶ Reiner (1958: I, lines 1-24; V-VI, lines 164-69; VII, lines 69-83; VIII, lines 79-84); cf. *idem* (1956: 139); CAD (4: 5).

³⁷ The root *ellu* is used to refer to purification in these rituals. But the most common word is 'Lipšur', which means 'to absolve' or 'to undo' evil.

³⁸ Literally 'incantation for appeasing an angry god'.

³⁹ Caplice (1965: 105-131; cf. 1967: 5-36; 1970: 137ff., 142, 146, 149).

⁴⁰ Gurney (1935: 31-96).

exorcism and rituals brought healing which in turn resulted in purification. However, the sufferer often did not know by what acts or omissions he offended the gods. Sometimes he simply confesses his many sins in the hope that confession alone will appease the gods. At others he denies any consciousness of sins, though admitting that they must have taken place since man is naturally sinful.⁴¹ Hence the priest enumerates all possible offences - religious, ritual and moral. It appears from the priest's enumeration of a large number of deities and the possible moral and ritual sins that the precise requirements of particular deities are unclear. In any case no deity is described as claiming a particular kind of purity, or prohibiting a certain defilement. Therefore it is not certain whether the texts are concerned with the individual's ritual purity and defilement, and whether these were ultimate concerns for the individual to be permitted or banned from the presence of the deity.

7.2.2. Hittite sources

In contrast to Babylonian rituals, in which evil and disease are almost always seen as the result of evil spirits who need to be exorcised, the Hittite rituals treat evil and disease largely as the result of physical contamination or the anger of a god who needs to be appeased.⁴² 'Only where a god was thought to be involved was it necessary to combine them [exorcism and appeasement] with methods proper to religion, such as prayer and sacrifice.'⁴³ However, most of these rituals are still concerned chiefly with disease, infirmity or portended evil with which a person has been afflicted, and not ritual purity which is expected from, or desired by, a deity or devotee.⁴⁴

The basic idea of purity and defilement apparently derives from the idea of cleanness and dirt in daily experience. Thus the bakers who make daily loaves for the gods and the place where they make them must be ritually clean.⁴⁵ No pig or dog was allowed to 'stay at the door of the place where the loaves were broken.'⁴⁶ Sometimes even abstract words of evil, curse, oath or blasphemy were thought to defile the gods and the priests, and certain rituals were performed to remove their evil effects.⁴⁷ However, the concern of these rituals often appears to be the fear of the evil effects that might follow the curse, not ritual purity itself. Similar beliefs of fear are expressed in the Hittite ritual of *Tunnawi*.⁴⁸

⁴¹ Lambert (1974: 274-75, 283, 285). Interestingly the patient relates that he entered the temple in a 'state of impurity', *la elluti* (the same root as seen above), and transgressed the 'rules of the gods', though it is not made clear what these rules were.

⁴² Cf. Wright (1987: 262).

⁴³ Gurney (1977: 46, 47); cf. Wright (1987: 31-60, 261-71).

⁴⁴ It is healing or relief from certain evil that is sought in most of the rituals, rather than purity (*pace* Wright).

⁴⁵ Furlani (1938: 355-56).

⁴⁶ *ANET* (207).

⁴⁷ *ANET* (346).

⁴⁸ This probably refers to the 'Old Woman' who performs the ritual on behalf of the afflicted. Goetze - Sturtevant (1938: 5).

The uncleanness is not specified, except in terms of disability, impotence and barrenness,⁴⁹ and the possible influences, such as evil, uncleanness, witchcraft, etc.⁵⁰ Elaborate rituals were then performed with the aid of sacrifices.⁵¹ Thus uncleanness in this context actually means sickness, and purification means healing. It is not certain if there is any idea of ritual impurity which banned a layman from approaching a deity.

Ritual purity of the priests: The priests must not approach the gods without being ritually pure.⁵² Sexual intercourse defiles the priests and the penalty for those who fail to observe purification rites before resuming their duties is capital punishment. Deformed and mutilated persons are taboo in and around temple precincts, and a ritual purification must be performed if they happen to walk about the temple.⁵³ This suggests deformed people cannot even worship at the temple, which clearly excludes them from temple service.

Purity of sacrificial materials: Animals for offerings must be without blemish,⁵⁴ and everything that was presented to the gods must be holy and pure. The utensils and the vessels by which offerings are made to gods must be kept ritually pure. No common person may draw near to them.⁵⁵ If a dog or pig approaches the temple vessels, or the food table, or eats the sacrificial loaves, all of them must be discarded.⁵⁶

7.2.3. Egyptian and Ugaritic sources

Due to constraints on space we will not be able to deal in detail the concept of purity in these sources. The common phrase, 'pure hands', *w'b ʿwy*, is used to describe priests in the presence of the gods or servants before kings, and the idea of purification plays important role in the cult of the dead.⁵⁷ However, the concept of purity appears to have little significance in the Ugaritic literature.⁵⁸

7.3. Pollution and purity in Israel

In contrast to the ancient Near Eastern literature where the concept of purity and impurity was only a secondary interest, the Israelite sources, especially the Priestly texts,

⁴⁹ Goetze - Sturtevant (1938: 5).

⁵⁰ Goetze - Sturtevant (1938: 13,15,17,19,21).

⁵¹ Cf. Gurney (1952: 151).

⁵² *ANET* (209); Gurney (1952: 150).

⁵³ *ANET* (497).

⁵⁴ Gurney (1952: 151).

⁵⁵ *ANET* (397,399).

⁵⁶ *ANET* (209,497). Similar instructions are found to keep the king pure, but they may be aimed more at personal safety than purity.

⁵⁷ *TDOT* (5: 288); cf. 2.2.2.

⁵⁸ *UM* (269,270); *TDOT* (5: 288).

present a highly developed system of purity and impurity in relation to the sanctuary where God was believed to be present. Everything was graded according to its proximity to, or function in, that sanctuary. Areas, cultic furniture and the ministrants within the sanctuary were graded according to their closeness to the 'most holy place' within the sanctuary where God's presence is epitomised.

The range of words and concepts used to identify and to deal with the impurity in different contexts (personal, social, religious), and in different respects (food, sex, relationships), suggests that Israel is more sensitive toward impurity than any other culture in the ANE.⁵⁹ We shall study these Hebrew terms in their important contexts, especially in the Priestly texts, to obtain a comprehensive picture of their meaning in relation to purity and defilement in Israel. Then we shall compare the findings with the patriarchal idea of pollution and purity.

7.3.1. Purity and defilement in the Priestly system

As we noted above, everything in the Priestly system is graded according to its relation to God who is thought of as dwelling in the sanctuary in the midst of the Israelite camp. Meanings are given to people, places and objects according to their closeness to, or function in, the sanctuary which is the heart of the priestly hierocracy, the high priest being the head and the clergy being the skeleton.⁶⁰ So we shall begin with the heart of the Israelite hierocracy, the tabernacle/sanctuary of God.

The Tabernacle: According to P the tabernacle constitutes two parts (Ex 25:9,40; 26:30; 27:8). The inner sanctum is the holy of the holies, קדש הקדשים⁶¹ (Ex 26:33).⁶² Everything is graded according to its proximity to this space. Next to this is the outer sanctum, the holy place, קדש, (Ex 26:33; 29:30; Lev 6:30; Num 28:7). The two sanctums are separated by a curtain. Another curtain separates the outer sanctum from the court, a rectangular enclosure.⁶³ The court is graded as a holy place, מקום קדוש (Ex 29:31; Lev 6:9,19), and the camp around is a clean place, מקום מטהר (Lev 10:14; 4:12; 6:11; Num 19:9). The materials used in each area of the tabernacle are also graded according to their closeness to the holy of the holies.

Nevertheless, the tabernacle built in this manner does not automatically become holy. The ritual status of the materials of the tabernacle can be viewed only as pure,⁶⁴ and it

⁵⁹ Four main words are used to signify the idea of purity and defilement: קדש, 'holy', חלל, 'profane', common', טהר, 'clean', and טמא, 'unclean'. Other less common words convey similar ideas. For a complete list of words and references, see Jenson (1992: 40); *ABD* (6: 729).

⁶⁰ Wellhausen (1885: 127).

⁶¹ Baudissin (1878: 20) first proposed the fundamental idea of the root as 'separation', and argued that קדוש is synonymous with מטהר. But this view is strongly disputed by Costecalde (1985: 137-79), who sees its root meaning as 'consecration'.

⁶² The Priestly system does not envisage a shrine for a form of God.

⁶³ The position of the tent in the court is adapted from Haran (1978: 149-56).

⁶⁴ Jenson (1992: 93).

must be elevated by a 'founding ritual'⁶⁵ of consecration (Exod 40:9-11; Lev 8:10-11), by which God will sanctify the tabernacle through the real presence of his glory (29:43-45).⁶⁶

The People of Israel: As noted above, Israelite society constitutes a clear hierarchy of priests, Levites and the people in general. The purity of the group depends on its closeness to the sanctuary. Aaron being the high priest heads the hierarchy and all priests must come only from his line. The initiation of the priesthood, described in great detail (Exod 28-29; Lev 8-9), takes place along with the founding ritual of the tabernacle with the appropriate rituals. From this moment the priests are permanently set apart from the community and elevated to a holiness equivalent to that of the sanctuary where they minister. However, no member of the priestly family with any physical defect or deformity may officiate in the cult, although he may partake of any of the offerings that are permissible to any priest (Lev 21:16-24).⁶⁷

The priesthood is given a unique grade of holiness with corresponding special rules of ritual, personal, family and social life. The high priest ministers in the inner sanctum, implying a special degree of holiness to him (Ex 28:5-43),⁶⁸ while the priests officiate in the holy place, the outer sanctum (Num 4:16,28,33). The high priest must marry only a virgin from his own clan, while ordinary priests may marry any virgin from Israel or a priestly widow (Lev 21:1-15; cf. Ezek 44:22).⁶⁹ The high priest cannot defile himself with a corpse or mourn for any one, even his own wife, while the priests may defile themselves for close relatives, such as father, mother, brother or virgin sister.

The Levites stand next in the hierarchy. They are never described as holy,⁷⁰ but were consecrated to God in place of the first born of Israel, and they have no access to the holy things on pain of death (Num 4:15). They are responsible for guarding the tabernacle from defilement from the outside while the priests protect the holy items inside. They probably acted as a buffer zone between the Israelites and the cult to protect the purity of the sanctuary. However, their ritual status is probably clean like other Israelites.

The people in general are next in line in order of purity. The normal Israelite is pure, טָהוֹר,⁷¹ for most of his life, and purity is a necessary precondition for any one to approach the sanctuary and offer sacrifices. From here on the grading of people and objects is that of 'unclean', i.e. those outside the camp, certain foods, and the gentiles. The 'very unclean' are those contaminated by the major impurities, such as scale disease, abnormal

⁶⁵ Gorman (1990: 54).

⁶⁶ Wilson (1992:137,85). Cf. the idea of Marduk purifying the temple, as we have seen above, but it is not integrated in a context like the biblical ritual.

⁶⁷ The ban on deformed persons in and around the temple precincts in Hittite religion seems to be more severe than it is in the Priestly system, see section 7.2.1. above.

⁶⁸ The garments possess communicable holiness, Jenson (1992: 127).

⁶⁹ An ordinary Israelite can also marry a divorcee or a non-priestly widow.

⁷⁰ Jenson (1992: 131).

⁷¹ This root with its nominal and adjectival form occurs over 200 times in the Hebrew Bible. Its most common occurrence is in the cultic contexts. *THAT* (647).

discharge and corpse contamination. Some scholars term this grading scale as a 'holiness spectrum'.⁷² So the ordinary Israelites, and even the priests when they are off duty, are clean and stand in the centre of the grading scale dividing the holy and the very holy on the one hand and the unclean and the very unclean on the other.

However, the normal ritual status of priests or laity can be defiled and the unclean cannot partake in the cult, especially the flesh of the peace offering.⁷³ But any one can be purified with an appropriate ritual and be brought back to his normal status. We shall now turn to this various ritual defilement and its remedy in the Priestly system.

7.3.2. Ritual defilement

The causes of impurity stem from some of the most mundane and common aspects of daily life, such as food, genital discharge, illegal sex, murder, disease and death.⁷⁴ Among these scale disease, abnormal discharge and corpse-contamination are viewed as major impurities. People affected with them are to be put out of the camp because their very presence in the camp would defile the tabernacle. But they can be allowed back into the camp after appropriate rituals. There is no sin or guilt attached to their impurities unless they fail to follow the stipulated purification rituals.⁷⁵ We shall summarise the priestly views about these issues and their relevance to the idea of purity in Israel beginning with the dietary laws. Lev 11 forms the first section of a series of instructions given on ritual purification from various impurities, including childbirth (ch 12), skin and fungus diseases (chs 13, 14) and bodily discharges (ch 15) affecting the people of Israel.

Food laws: Leviticus 11, 20:25-26 and Deuteronomy 14:3-21 are the most important texts dealing with the food laws of Israel.⁷⁶ The thrust of Lev 11 is to identify the *unclean*, טמא, and the *abominable*, שֶׁקֶץ, animals which communicate degrees of impurity, and to give procedures of purification in the event of pollution contracted by them. However, we cannot discuss here the issue of why certain foods are טמא and others are not, or which came first, criteria or taboos.⁷⁷ The author's reasons in vv. 44-45 seem to be theological, implied in v 44: יְהוָה כִּי אֲנִי, 'for I am Yawheh' and כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי, 'for I am holy'. As Milgrom notes, a phrase with כִּי 'always provides the rationale for the previous

⁷² Cf. Jenson (1992: 36-37).

⁷³ Lev 7:19ff.; Num 9:13; 2 Chr 30:17-19; Ezr 6:19-22; cf. Num 18:11,13; Lev 10:14; 22:4.

⁷⁴ Wright helpfully distinguishes between necessary and avoidable impurities, *ABD* (6: 730).

⁷⁵ Jenson's (1992: 139) view that the restrictions are only precautionary not punitive is an understatement. Cf. Mesopotamian evidence that people with abnormal discharge are guilty of a weighty sin, and Hittite evidence that those who fail to purify themselves after intercourse are liable to capital punishment.

⁷⁶ Deut 14:3-21 is almost exactly parallel to Lev 11, with the ideas of clean and unclean described by the same words. טמא is used thrice (vv. 8,10,19) and מְהוּר twice (vv. 11,20) in the same sense as in Lev 11. Cf. Gen 7: 2,8, where מְהוּר is used both positively and negatively to designate 'clean' and 'not clean' animals. For a recent and detailed analysis of these texts and a comprehensive bibliography on dietary laws, see Firmage (1990: 184); Milgrom (1991: 643-742); Houston (1993).

⁷⁷ For a critique of different views, see Feldman (1977: 49-53); Wenham (1981: 6-11); Milgrom (1990: 176-191); Firmage (1990: 177-82); Jenson (1992: 76-79); Houston (1993: 69-78; 93-114).

statement.’⁷⁸ Thus the reason Israel must avoid certain animals⁷⁹ in their diet is because first, Yahweh their God is holy. Secondly, the people who follow him likewise must be holy.⁸⁰ This is reinforced by the idea of Yahweh’s legal ownership of Israel in v 45 (cf. Lev 19:2; 20:7,26).⁸¹

Similarly a distinction is placed upon the animal kingdom in relation to Israel that some are טהור while others are טמא, although there is nothing intrinsically bad in the forbidden animals themselves. Yet since they are forbidden they are ‘desacralized, undivine and sacrally unfit.’⁸² While the food regulations mark Israel’s separateness from other nations, the bodily discharge, various kinds of scale disease and death pollution separate the individual from other Israelites as unclean.

Genital discharges: Five major types of bodily discharges, varying in their duration and intensity and accordingly in their procedures of purification, have been identified in the Priestly system. All of them are described as unclean, טמא, and they exclude individuals from normal social intercourse and from worship.

First is a woman’s discharge after childbirth (Lev 12). The impurity involved here is compared to that of menstruation (v.2,5). Secondly, the woman’s normal discharge or menstruation, נדה (Lev 15:19-24). Thirdly, the woman’s abnormal discharge, זבה, (Lev 15:25-30) is different from menstruation. She will be unclean, טמא, for all these impurities for varying periods. However, there is no moral guilt or social stigma attached to her impurity,⁸³ nor there any hint of apotropaic or medicinal functions to the sacrifice as in other ancient Near Eastern cultures.⁸⁴

Fourthly, the abnormal male discharge, זב, (Lev 15:2-15) probably due to a type of gonorrheic disease.⁸⁵ This person is unclean, טמא, and becomes a primary source of uncleanness. His bed, saddle and seat, as also his body and spittle,⁸⁶ become potential secondary sources of pollution. When he is ‘healed’, מדר, ⁸⁷ of his discharge he must bring an offering of two turtle doves or two young pigeons to the priest who ‘offers’⁸⁸ them ‘for

⁷⁸ Milgrom (1991: 686).

⁷⁹ The immediate context may refer only to swarming creatures of v 43 but the verb רמש also in v 46, can apply to all animals; cf. Gen 7:21; 9:3 for land animals, and Gen 1:21, Ps 69:35 for sea creatures; Milgrom (1991: 687).

⁸⁰ Houston (1993: 54); Feldman (1977: 52).

⁸¹ Milgrom (1991: 688); Houston (1993: 54).

⁸² Feldman (1977: 51).

⁸³ Milgrom (1991: 760).

⁸⁴ Cf. Egyptian and Hittite customs, *ERE* (10: 477); Milgrom (1991: 750).

⁸⁵ Milgrom (1991: 907).

⁸⁶ Among the Hittites saliva was considered a source of impurity, and in Mesopotamia a symptom of certain diseases, or poisonous in the form of foam. But in Israel spitting was just an expression of disdain (Num 12:14; Deut 25:9), not a source of impurity. (Milgrom (1991: 915).

⁸⁷ מדר in v 13 is used in this sense and not in ritual sense; Milgrom (1991: 921). Interestingly, this is probably the only place where the idea of ‘purity’ or ‘clean’ is used of healing disease. In the ANE, however, the most common terms used for healing indicate ‘to clean, purify’.

⁸⁸ The verb used here is עשה which ‘in cultic context connotes the entire sacrificial ritual (e.g. 15:30; 9:7; 14:30).’ Milgrom (1991: 925). Cf. ch. 2 n.84.

his discharge', which implies that the person with the impurities is not accused of sin as in Mesopotamia.⁸⁹

Fifthly, the normal male discharge with no intercourse involved is ritually unclean, **טמא**.⁹⁰ As in the ANE, the discharge during normal intercourse defiles both men and women. That sexual intercourse pollutes and must be followed by a bath is attested among Hittites,⁹¹ Sabaeans, ancient Persians,⁹² Hindus⁹³ and Greeks.⁹⁴ But only among the Hebrews does pollution remain until evening.⁹⁵

Disease: Leviticus 13 and 14 deal with the identification and purification of a kind of disease called **צרעת**, which affects people (13:2-46; 14:1-32), clothes (13:47-58), and houses (14:33-53). **צרעת** in its various forms occurs no less than thirty-three times in these two chapters, and another twenty-two times elsewhere.⁹⁶ It is not a leprosy as has been traditionally translated, but probably a type of scale disease which may not be infectious, or dangerous. It is ritually unclean, **טמא** (used thirty times in this context), like other impurities discussed above.⁹⁷ In each of the cases symptoms, priestly inspection, diagnosis and prescription are described. Elaborate rituals, including a bird-blood ritual, are performed for people and houses.⁹⁸

Death: The priestly system reckons corpse contamination as the highest form of pollution.⁹⁹ The law of corpse-contamination (Num 19) states that persons contaminated by corpse pollution (Num 19:11,14-16) can be purified by the sprinkling of 'the water of impurity' **מי נדה**, on the third and the seventh day of their impurity followed by washing their clothes and bathing and waiting till evening on the seventh day. Similarly, inanimate things are to be purified by the sprinkling of the water of impurity on the third and seventh day. But metal articles, besides sprinkling, must be purified by fire while non-metal objects must be washed with water (vv. 17-19; cf. Num 31:19-24). Any one who fails to purify himself from such a defilement risks the defilement of the tabernacle/sanctuary of Yahweh and consequently risks the extirpation of himself from the people of God (19:13,20). The

⁸⁹ A man with constant ejaculation carries a weighty sin, see above. Cf. Milgrom (1991: 926).

⁹⁰ In Egypt one had to abstain from sex for at least a whole day, nine days for a priest, before entering a temple. Sauneron (1960: 340,345) cited in Milgrom (1991: 932).

⁹¹ See the section on Hittite rituals above. An interesting example of affliction of loss of speech on king Mursili because of his neglect of purification after sexual intercourse is cited in Goetze - Pedersen (1934: lines 18-21) cited in Milgrom (1991: 933).

⁹² Milgrom (1991: 932).

⁹³ Manu (2.181; 5.63,144; 11.121-23) cited in Milgrom 1991: (932).

⁹⁴ Burkert (1985: 87); cf. Milgrom (1991: 932).

⁹⁵ That semen defiles because it involves loss of life was first suggested by Ramban. Milgrom (1991: 934; 1001-3); cf. Wenham (1983: 433-34); *ANET* (665).

⁹⁶ Ex 4:6; Lev 22:4; Num 5:2; 12:10(x2); Deut 24:8; 2 Sam 3:29; 2 Ki 5:1,3,6,7,11,27(x2); 7:3,8; 15:5; 2 Chr 26:19,20,21(x2),23.

⁹⁷ Cf. Milgrom (1991: 817-18)

⁹⁸ Cf. Wright (1987: 78); ch. 2 n.118.

⁹⁹ The author of 2 Ki 22,23 probably had this view; cf. Levine (1993: 469,477).

priest must be kept apart from the corpse contamination¹⁰⁰ at all costs¹⁰¹ since he deals with the holy things of God (Lev 21:1-4,10-12, cf. Lev 10:4-7).¹⁰²

If we go backwards from death pollution on the scale of impurity we come across death at work or symbolised in various degrees in those affected by various kinds of impurities. The scale-diseased experience a kind of living death (cf. Num 12:12), being excluded from the community and the cult.¹⁰³ So also the זבה, זב, the parturient and the menstruant are excluded for declining periods of time from the social and cultic access. Then come those polluted by semen discharge, intercourse, carcass-contamination and so on. Not only the results (denial of social and cultic access), but also the cause (loss of semen, blood, infection) of impurities are to be seen as a form of death at work in those who are affected by them. Thus anything related to death or loss of life, either real or symbolic, pollutes in the Priestly system. But appropriate rituals can restore the unclean to their normal status, that is clean. The range of sacrifices such as מנחה, חטאת, עולה and אשם offered in these rituals suggest that they deal with any sacrilege against Yahweh or inadvertent sin related to God's moral and ritual law.

7.3.3. Comparative analysis

First, in all the extra-biblical examples of ritual cleansing, the parallel with biblical ritual exists only in the release of the birds. Thereafter the analogy breaks. As Wright correctly notes, the biblical rite is intended to remove the residual impurity after the healing, whereas in Mesopotamian ritual it is not a disease but an evil, or sometimes a suspected evil. And the bird in the ritual is concretised as the evil itself and the evil is removed as the bird is dismissed. But no biblical ritual is meant for healing, and the released bird in this case does not take away the disease but only the ritual impurities.¹⁰⁴ Only in one case, the scapegoat ritual, is it assumed that the dismissed animal takes away the sins of the community confessed over it by the high priest. However, this ritual has nothing to do with the particular evils stemming from sins of the individual.

Secondly, the cultic law implies, but does not explicitly state, that the disease could be a result of moral failures on the part of the afflicted. The various sacrifices prescribed for the healed person point in this direction (e.g. the אשם covers the sins related to sacrilege against Yahweh,¹⁰⁵ while the חטאת, עולה and מנחה serve an expiatory function, cover a

¹⁰⁰ Corpse-contaminated persons and objects carry a secondary pollution, v 22, cf. Lev 22:4-6.

¹⁰¹ The only instance in priestly legislation where a priest is explicitly stated to be defiled is when he officiates in the red cow preparation.

¹⁰² It is interesting to note that a Nazirite during his vow is set on a par with a ministering high priest in relation to death pollution (Num 6: 6-9), and in some cases, such as wine he is under stricter laws than a high priest, (Num 6:4 cf. Lev 10:8).

¹⁰³ Jenson (1992: 84).

¹⁰⁴ Wright (1987: 84, n. 37; 85), though correct in his argument, he is still vague in his definition of evil as he confuses it with impurity, which the priestly writer is at pains to avoid.

¹⁰⁵ Milgrom (1976: 80-82).

person's inadvertent sins related to God's moral as well as ritual law).¹⁰⁶ Other non-priestly texts confirm this view (Miriam, Num 12:9; Gehazi, 2 Ki 5:27; Uzziah, 2 Chr 26:18-21; cf. 2 Ki 5; 2 Sam 3:29; Deut 28:27). In other words, as the disease proceeds from God, so also does the healing (cf. Lev 14:34). This is particularly important for the priestly editor because all over the ANE such things are taken as signs of the portended evil caused by either evil spirits or a sorcerer.

Thirdly, the sole concern of the biblical rite is impurity and its implications for the community and the sancta, whereas the sole concern of the non-biblical rites is the evil in its various manifestations - various kinds of disease, fear, misfortune, failure, defeat and even death - but never the impurity. Ritual impurity or breaking ritual taboos could be the cause of the evil, but its removal or restoring of purity is never the object of the rituals. This is the fundamental difference we have to reckon with. There is the idea of purity in the ANE, but it is often identified with healing and wholeness, there is no rationale for purity, and logically there could be no demand for it. This is probably the unique contribution of the Priestly writer.

7.4. Pollution and purity in the patriarchal narratives

As noted in our introduction, there are a number of allusions to death and burial mourning customs in the patriarchal narratives. We shall first examine these instances to see whether they reflect a belief of pollution contracted by a corpse or tombs such as was common in Israel and the ANE. Then we shall examine the one clear incidence of purification in the Jacob cycle to discern its implications for the religion of the patriarch.

7.4.1. Pollution in relation to death and burial

It is not certain whether the patriarchal stories show any concern for defilement contracted through contact with the dead. Several times death, burial and even mourning are recorded but the texts seem to be interested more in the grief caused by the death of the loved ones and their proper burial than in any pollution caused by the dead.¹⁰⁷ For instance, there is no mourning recorded at the death and burial of Abraham, Isaac, Rachel, while it is recorded for Sarah and for Joseph's assumed death, and it is alluded to in the case^{of} minor characters like Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, and Judah's unnamed wife.¹⁰⁸ The concept of pollution caused by death is more likely occur where mourning rituals are

¹⁰⁶ Milgrom (1991: 822).

¹⁰⁷ Gen 23 cf. 24:67; 25:7-10; 35:18,19; 35:29; 47:29-30; 49:29-32; 50:5,13,25. For a discussion on the concern for proper burial in Israel., see 2.4.4; cf. Sarna (1989: 156).

¹⁰⁸ Gen 37:34,35; 35:8; 38:12.

described. So we shall examine Genesis 23 and 50, where mourning for Sarah and Jacob are recorded.

Gen 23. As we have argued in 2.4.4, the exclusive use of ספר for mourning for the dead and בכה both for weeping in general and for mourning for the dead (v. 2) suggests that ritual mourning was involved in Gen 23, although this chapter is mainly concerned with Abraham's purchase of the cave of Machpelah for Sarah's burial. This might involve other traditional mourning customs.¹⁰⁹ But is there an idea of pollution by death here? Westermann says: 'Das מלפני [in Gen 23:4] bringt zum Ausdruck, daß ein Toter unrein ist.'¹¹⁰ מלפני, literally 'from before me' or 'out of my sight', probably a fixed phrase, is also used in v. 8. The noun פני is variously used with the preposition מן to indicate removal from before a person, place or object, but there is no suggestion in any of the instances that the ritual status of the latter is in view.¹¹¹ Therefore Westermann's suggestion that Abraham's expression 'out of my sight', מלפני, indicates the uncleanness of the corpse is unlikely.¹¹² Nevertheless, the idea that death causes pollution is taken for granted in many ancient cultures, although it is not explicitly stated here.

Gen 50:1-14: Jacob's death, burial and mourning involving both Egyptian and Israelite customs are elaborately described in this passage. There is an allusion to uncleanness caused by death in v. 4 where Joseph does not present himself before Pharaoh to request for leave in order to go to Canaan to bury Jacob. This is probable because a person in mourning clothes is not allowed in the presence of a king.¹¹³

7.4.2. Pollution and purification in the Jacob cycle

Genesis 35:1-4 in recent discussion: We^{have} a clear example of purification in Gen 35:1-4, where Jacob exhorts his family members to purify themselves before they appear before the God of Bethel. Jacob's call to purification of his family is summed up in three imperatives and an action in vv. 2b and 4:

הסרו את־אלהי הגזר אשר בתכם	Put away the foreign gods that are among you,
והטהרו והחליפו שמלתיכם ¹¹⁴	and purify yourselves, and change your garments;
ויחזו אלי־עקב את כל־אלהי הגזר אשר בידם	So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had,
ואת־הנזמים אשר באזניהם	and the rings that were in their ears;
ויסמן אתם יעקב תחת האלה אשר עמדשכם	and Jacob hid them under the oak which was near Shechem.

The call to purification and the renunciation and burial of foreign gods raise serious issues with regard to their origin and setting, and many scholars have interpreted them

¹⁰⁹ Cf. ch. 2 n.251 .
¹¹⁰ Westermann (1981: 457 = 1985: 373). The English translation misquotes the Hebrew as מעלפני.
¹¹¹ Cf. Gen 41:46; 47:10; Lev 9:24; 10:2; Deut 17:18; 1 Ki 8:54; 2 Ki 5:27; 6:32; Jon 1:3,10; Est 1:19 Eccl 10:5, etc.; BDB (817f.). Only in 2 Ki 5:27 is the person removed unclean, but this is not indicated by מלפני.
¹¹² No other commentator so far suggested this.
¹¹³ Esth 4:2; Sarna (1989: 348); cf. Westermann (1986: 199)
¹¹⁴ We may recall טהור, the common technical word, for purification in the Priestly writings.

assuming different situations behind vv. 2b and 4. Alt, Nielsen and Schmitt focus chiefly on Jacob's command to part with foreign gods and his subsequent action of burying them. For Alt 'the renunciation of foreign gods' was originally a Canaanite/Shechemite rite adopted by the Israelites who reduced it to a preparatory ritual for pilgrimage from Shechem to Bethel. Its origin lies in the exclusiveness of Yahwism and is closer to Josh 24:14,23 than to Gen 35:2,4. Thus in Gen 35:1-4,7 the Elohist projected on Jacob a custom practised in his time.¹¹⁵ Nielsen agrees with Alt that the ritual was of Canaanite origin, but thinks that it was a magical ritual analogous to those attested in the Egyptian execration texts and certain magical texts of Mesopotamia where it was used against enemies.¹¹⁶ When the Israelites adopted it from the Canaanites, they also used it for similar purpose, and only later did it take on the new meaning of renunciation of foreign gods as in Jos 24:14,23.¹¹⁷

Schmitt, on the other hand, rejects the views of both Alt and Nielsen. He thinks that the burial of 'foreign gods' in Gen 35:2,4 could hardly have its origin in the exclusivism of Yahwism. Nor do the foreign gods represent the enemy figurines that were destroyed or abused as was the practice in the execration texts and the Mesopotamian texts, but were kept in the holy *temenos*. For Schmitt, the foreign gods were simple 'talismans' or 'guardian gods' analogous to teraphim (Gen 31:19,30ff.), and the burial of these statues was a once-for-all act which ought to be compared to the foundation-deposit that guards the sanctuary against its possible enemies. Thus Gen 35:2,4 belongs not to the 'pilgrimage from Shechem to Bethel' but to the 'foundation legend' of the sanctuary of Shechem, and the burial of these statues would have been interpreted later as a 'renunciation' of the 'foreign gods'.¹¹⁸

Garcia-Treto focuses on Jacob's exhortation to purify and change garments and the aspect of the renunciation of earrings, aspects largely ignored by the previous scholars. He thinks that the ritual behind 35:1-4 was a 'transition rite' or a 'separation rite', analogous to that performed by Moslem pilgrims before entering the sacred area of Mecca, in which devotees not only put aside foreign gods (which he considers as fetishes or guardian gods analogous to the teraphim) but also earrings (which for him are charms), and purify themselves and change their clothes at one holy place with a view to leaving for another.¹¹⁹ He argues that the text does not specify that Jacob 'buried' or 'destroyed' the figurines; it simply states that Jacob 'hid' (וַיִּטְמֵן) them under the tree,¹²⁰ probably with a view to recovering them after the pilgrimage. The rite was later interpreted as a 'renunciation of

¹¹⁵ Alt (1953: 79-88); cf. de Pury (1975: 573).

¹¹⁶ It may be added here that the enemy figurines in the Mesopotamian rituals were usually made for the purpose, not surrendered by the devotees.

¹¹⁷ Nielsen (1954/55: 103-22; 1955: 234-40).

¹¹⁸ Schmitt (1964: 48-54), cited in de Pury (1975: 574-75).

¹¹⁹ Garcia-Treto (1967: 195-200) cited in de Pury (1975: 575ff.); *ANET* (144).

¹²⁰ Cf. Keel (1973: 307-8).

foreign gods'. Further, he identifies Bethel with Mount Gerizim, because it does not make sense for pilgrims to perform the preparatory rite a good day's journey before they enter the מקום area at Bethel. Thus 35:1-4,7 does not indicate Jacob's going up to Bethel, but rather explains the preparatory rite of Jacob and his clan at the sacred tree of Shechem (12:6), before they climb in procession up to the מקום of Bethel on Mount Gerizim, the traditional spot of Jacob's dream, where the main cultic act unfolds (35:7,14).¹²¹ De Pury rightly points out that this interpretation does not present the rite as a total reversal of its primitive sense but simply as a 'radicalisation' of its initial scope.¹²²

However, de Pury rejects Garcia-Treto's hypothesis identifying the Bethel of 35:1-4 with Mount Gerizim. For him Jacob's מקום should be looked for between Bethel and Ai (12:8; 13:3f.). He agrees that the rites of purification, if preparatory, could hardly begin at Shechem, but he argues that they were performed in the vicinity of Bethel, probably under the 'oak of weeping' where Deborah, Rachel's nurse, was buried. He suggests that the 'oak of weeping' in the present tradition is a confusion for the 'palm of Deborah' (Judg 4:5) probably situated in the same region, because Deborah, Rachel's nurse, was unknown, and burial under a tree is unattested elsewhere in the OT. Thus the burial associated with the 'oak of weeping' originally was concerned not with the death of Deborah but with the figurines and the charms of the pilgrims who carried them to Bethel. If the tree bore the name 'oak of weeping', it signified the ritual lamentation as part of the 'rites of passage' (cf. Hos 12:5). Thus the rites of purification were not 'preparatory', as Garcia-Treto assumed, but the rite of renunciation of foreign gods in vv. 2,4 is the result of a later reinterpretation of the primitive nomadic rite whose original establishment is attested in Jos 24:23. These two rites were placed together when the two cycles of Jacob (35:1-4 E) and Israel (33:18-20; 34 J), were joined by a redactor, and the phrase in v. 4בס עִם־שִׁכְמָא was introduced when these rites of passage were transferred to Shechem.¹²³ However, de Pury gives no clear indication about when the rites were transferred to Shechem and when the two cycles were joined together. Garcia-Treto and de Pury differ only over the location where the purification rituals were performed, and they generally agree that the rituals were preparatory to or part of the 'rites of passage' before entering into the holy place.

Keel, by contrast, rejects the views of Garcia-Treto and de Pury.¹²⁴ In his view, removing foreign gods belonged to the Deuteronomic-Deuteronomistic layer, while burying idols was inserted by the Elohist. These two cannot come from same author because there is a tension between the two. The demand to remove foreign gods in the Deuteronomic-

¹²¹ Garcia-Treto (1967: 202ff.) cited in de Pury (1975: 575ff.).

¹²² De Pury (1975: 577).

¹²³ De Pury (1975: 578-83).

¹²⁴ Keel (1973: 305-36,326) shows on the basis of several close parallels from the ANE that the burial or hiding of idols, votive figurines, cult-furniture and other articles considered sacred is relatively common in the ANE. Out of respect for their sanctity they were not thrown away but were buried at a holy place, when they become unusable due to lack of space, or damage or change of religious ideas.

Deuteronomistic literature was usually followed by a violent destruction of them (Deut 7:5,25; 12:3; 2 Ki 23:4-20), but in Jacob's story they were carefully buried, as was common in the ANE.¹²⁵ Thus these statements have different origins and purposes. The former usually occurs in the context of 'Yahweh war',¹²⁶ thus the demand to purify themselves was not a preparation for a cultic act but a preparation for 'divine horror'.¹²⁷ By inserting 35:2b, the glossator intended to show how God intervened on behalf of Jacob when he departed from Shechem. The Elohist gloss (35:4), on the other hand, understood the idols as the teraphim of Rachel and their burial as some obsolete cult objects.

Westermann rejects the idea that the burial of the foreign gods could be explained by parallels from archaeology,¹²⁸ but accept that vv. 2b and 4 are later insertions. The ideas of renunciation of foreign gods in v. 2b and purification in v. 4 are combined here by the redactor. They occur separately in Jos 24:14 and Ex 19:10f., but nowhere else together. They are out of place here as they presuppose priests and a fixed cult. This was the context of the redactor who was concerned with the purity of his time, according to which the patriarch must renounce all that hinders Yahweh's worship before entering Yahweh's land and sanctuaries.¹²⁹

By contrast, Sarna interprets the renunciation of idols and the command for purification in the light of ch. 34 and the rest of the OT. He thinks that the idols of vv. 2b and 4 were most likely derived from the looting of Shechem. Like Keel, he notes that the usual procedure of disposing of idols in the OT, including Moses' handling of the golden calf, was utter destruction, and that Jacob's burial of them is unparalleled. It was probably intended to neutralise the veneration of the oak.¹³⁰ Similarly the subject of purification alludes to the theme of defilement dominant in ch. 34. Jacob's family was defiled both by the polluting effect of the idols carried by them or their captives and by corpse contamination at Shechem. Thus the command to purify themselves was to effect their passage 'from profane to sacred space', or to prepare them 'for an experience with God'.¹³¹

As can be observed from the above discussion, there is no consensus among scholars about the origin of either the burial of the foreign idols or the call to purification recounted in 35:2b,4. The fact that 'burial of idols' is unattested elsewhere in the OT suggests that the author was faithful to his sources. While Westermann acknowledges the

¹²⁵ Keel (1973: 331-32).

¹²⁶ Josh 24:14,23; Judg 10:16; 1 Sam 7:3. Keel (1973: 327-28).

¹²⁷ The words used in the present context for purification, טָהַר, and fear, חָסַד are (post-)exilic; earlier קָדַשׁ and פָּחַד were used respectively (Ex 19:14, 22; Josh 7:13; 2 Sam 11:4; Ex 15:16; 1 Sam 11:7; Isa 2:10,19,21). Keel (1973: 329-30).

¹²⁸ Westermann (1985: 551).

¹²⁹ Westermann (1985: 549-51).

¹³⁰ Sarna (1989: 239-40); Keel (1973: 333) thinks that it was to desecrate the place.

¹³¹ Sarna (1989: 240); cf. Wenham (1994: 324).

patriarch's unique action of the burial of idols, and similar burial and purification in other religions in the ANE, he still insists that these were a projection of the redactor's own situation onto the patriarch. But if the redactor was so concerned with the purity of his own day, why did he allow the patriarch to erect a pillar which was certainly unacceptable in his day?¹³² Similarly, Keel accepts that the patriarch's action of burying idols is unique in the Bible and hints at the possible reflection of such a practice in the ANE, but he tries to explain it entirely from the context of 'Yahweh war' in the OT. While this is possible, the idea that the idols were always destroyed violently in the Deuteronomistic tradition is not true. The tradition in Joshua 24, for instance, does not recount what was done with the idols. Therefore, while the call for purification may be explained to some extent from the traditions of later Israel, the burial of idols cannot be explained. Similarly, de Pury's view that the burial of idols was a reinterpretation of the primitive nomadic rite such as attested in Josh 24:23, or Garcia-Treto's idea that the idols were hidden for safe-keeping with a view to recovering them later, are not convincing. All these authors work on the basis of supposed tradition behind the present text, with varied hypotheses, none of which fits well with the plain reading of the text, especially in regard to the burial of the idols. Sarna, however, takes the final author's view point and tries to establish links between Gen 35 and 34 on the one hand and Gen 35 and the rest of the OT on the other, and he reaches a similar conclusion as de Pury and Garcia-Treto. He strongly suggests that the 'foreign gods' to be renounced probably came from the booty taken from Shechem by the members of Jacob's family or their captives. Besides flocks and people, Jacob's sons took 'all that was in the houses' (34:29). Although this expression is hyperbolic, it can hardly exclude whatever gold and silver was decked on their idols. Further, the call for purification alludes to the corpse contamination involved in the massacre of the Shechemites. This is probable in the light of the emphasis on defilement in ch. 34,¹³³ although this would mean that the author who consistently portrayed the patriarchal religion thus far as one without priests or fixed sanctuary or laws of sacrifices and offerings, has now attributed the knowledge of the law of corpse contamination or pollution by idols to a patriarch who had no knowledge Mosaic law. As we have noted above, pollution or purity of an individual or community in Israel was mostly in relation to the sanctuary.¹³⁴ It is unlikely that the author expected Jacob to engage in rituals attendant at an Israelite sanctuary. On the other hand, the patriarch's rituals involved the physical cleanliness of bathing and washing clothes, as is attested in the ANE and Israel, and a burial of foreign gods, as is attested only in the ANE. Therefore ch. 34 forms only part of the background, in that it explains the patriarch's actions in relation to the idols. In his call for purification, however, the patriarch was

¹³² Westermann (1985: 548-49) argues that the redactor is responsible for bringing together J and E materials and adding his own in ch. 35.

¹³³ מִטְמָא is used in vv. 5,13,27, probably in moral sense, cf. חָלַל in 49:4; Sarna (1989: 234,333); *pace* Wright, *ABD* (6: 734). Elsewhere P uses חֲזֵבָה for idolatry and intermarriage with idolaters.

¹³⁴ See 'purification offering' in ch. 2.3.

probably following popular custom of purification before approaching a holy place. Further, both the burial of the idols and the call for purification can be explained in the light of Jacob's experience at Bethel, the author's belief that the idols of Laban's household had invaded Jacob's family, Jacob's long stay at Shechem and finally Jacob's intention to rally his family's allegiance to the God of Bethel. Thus all these can be explained from within the Jacob cycle.

7.4.3. A synthesis

The present form of Gen 35 appears to be a carefully conceived unit as it presupposes most, if not all, of the other Jacob stories contained in Genesis.¹³⁵ The links of the story are obvious as the final author brings Jacob safely back from Paddan-aram to Shechem (33:18-20). Following Dinah's rape (ch. 34), he was forced to move to Bethel, but not without Yahweh's direction, since Jacob had vowed to Yahweh to build him a sanctuary there if Yahweh brought him safely back to his father's home (28:15; 31:13; 35:1; cf. 37:1). For the final author vv. 1-7, with which we are concerned here, are a unit¹³⁶ which follows ch. 34 well. Jacob was preoccupied with, if not dismayed by, the consequences of his sons' violent actions at Shechem. 35:1ff. not only shows God's way out of Shechem but also links it up with Jacob's first journey (ch. 28). Jacob's response in v. 3 not only picks up the ideas of v. 1 but also refers to his troublesome life all along.¹³⁷ Verses 5-6 refer to the safe passage from Shechem to Bethel, and v. 7 refers back to Jacob's vow in 28:20-22.

However, the new elements such as the call to purification and the renunciation of foreign gods and other tokens of idolatry introduced in vv. 2b and 4 are unique to the Jacob story. At least four reasons, as mentioned above, may be given from the overall Jacob cycle to show that these not only cohere with the total Jacob story but also explain the author's view of the religion of the patriarch.

First, Jacob called for the ritual of purification and renunciation of idols at Bethel because it was there he first felt the awesome presence of God. He believed that the God of Bethel dwelt there in a special way, hence he made a vow to raise a sanctuary there. That this experience and belief of Jacob has been reinforced all along his life in Paddan-aram is acknowledged in v.3, which probably recalls God's promise of presence and the corresponding condition in Jacob's vow (28:13-16,20-22). Further, Jacob's wives clearly acknowledged that it was the same God who gave them children (29:31 - 30:24), despite their rivalry and magical means of obtaining children. Besides, Jacob himself acknowledged that it was the God of Bethel, the 'God of my father' who helped him

¹³⁵ Westermann (1985: 549); Wenham (1994: 322).

¹³⁶ Gunkel (1902: 335); cf. Westermann (1985: 549), Wenham (1994: 323-24).

¹³⁷ This may refer first to his flight from and return to his brother Esau (28:15; 32:9-12), then to his troubles with Laban (31:24,29,42), and also to his recent trouble at Shechem (34:30,31).

through his hard service to Laban (30:30; 31:5,9,10-13,42), and then from the danger of Esau on his return to the land of Canaan (chs. 32,33). Thus the place and the God associated with the place became special in the experience of Jacob. Once the place is reckoned as sacred on account of a theophany, the worshipper cannot approach it without proper preparation, since he believes that God dwells there. Further, the naming of the place thrice (28:19; 35:7,15) indicates its special significance for the author.

Therefore Jacob's call for a special preparation of his household to meet with the God of Bethel is not out of place in the present context, although preparation of this sort was not called for elsewhere in the patriarchal narratives.¹³⁸ It is not necessary to suppose that the religious situation was the same with all the patriarchs. Jacob's first encounter with God at Bethel and his reaction to it in raising a pillar instead of the usual altar by Abraham and Isaac suggests that his situation was different from other patriarchs. It may be pointed out that nowhere else was a patriarch commanded to build an altar.¹³⁹ Abraham and Isaac, even Jacob at times, built altars on their own, either in response to a theophany or on arriving at a new place. No preparation of any sort is reported, but it would be unlikely that the ancients performed worship without proper ritual preparations.¹⁴⁰ Preparation of some sort, moral or physical, before meeting with a deity or appearing at a sanctuary is almost universal, as we have seen in the Mesopotamian and Hittite literature. Although there was no sanctuary for Jacob at Bethel, the place was reckoned by him as God's abode, בית אלהים.

Secondly, Jacob called for purification because he (or the editor) realised that אלהי הנכר, literally 'foreign gods',¹⁴¹ had invaded his household through his association with Laban's household. Jacob would have known this by his long association with the house of Laban, or at least by his last encounter with Laban who charged him of stealing his household gods. Several texts make clear that both Jacob and Laban were aware of the distinction between the God of Jacob's father and the gods of Laban. As we have already noted, Jacob was constantly aware of the presence of the 'God of my father', while Laban admits that Yahweh blessed him on account of Jacob (30:27), and that he could not harm Jacob because he was warned by Elohim, the 'God of your father' (31:24,29).

The distinction between the gods of Laban and Jacob is nowhere clearer than in the episode of Jacob's flight from Laban and in the subsequent covenant between them. Laban charged Jacob directly with stealing *his* gods: 'why did you steal *my* gods?' (31:30).¹⁴² Jacob's reply makes this distinction equally clear: 'Anyone with whom you find *your* gods shall not live' (31:32); 'If the God of *my* father, the god of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac,

¹³⁸ Pace Westermann (1985: 550).

¹³⁹ Cf. Wenham (1994:323).

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Garcia-Treto (1967: 178-208); de Pury (1975: 575-77); Ex 19:10, 14; Josh 24:14,23; cf. 1 Sam 16:5. Similar preparations are also required in Hittite rituals. See above.

¹⁴¹ This phrase 'invariably connotes non-Israelite' gods, cf. Isa 56:3,6. Sarna (1989: 240).

¹⁴² Rachel's תרפים are equated here and in v. 32 with Laban's אלהים.

had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed' (31:42; cf. 29,30,32).¹⁴³ Then in the covenant between them each swears by his own god, while Laban also says, 'The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father (אלהי אביהם), judge (ישפט) between us' (31:53). If this treaty is analogous to boundary treaties of the ANE, it is not difficult to see that Laban invoked two (or more?) different deities, the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, 'the ancestor of the Arameans' (22:20-23).¹⁴⁴ The plural verb indicates that Laban saw the distinction between the god of Nahor and the God of Abraham.¹⁴⁵ The different deities invoked in the Sefire texts similarly indicate 'the ethnic diversity of the parties involved'.¹⁴⁶ The term אביהם, probably refers to Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor. Elsewhere he is described as a polytheist (Jos 24:2). So Laban probably also invoked the gods of their common ancestor. In response, however, 'Jacob ignores Laban's formula and invokes only the 'Fear of his father Isaac'.¹⁴⁷ Thus it is plausible to think that Jacob also knew the distinction between them. Therefore Jacob's command to renounce 'foreign gods' probably alludes to the gods of Laban, although he is portrayed as ignorant of Rachel's stolen teraphim.¹⁴⁸

Thirdly, Jacob's long stay at Shechem (33:18 - 34:31) would have made it possible for foreign idols to enter Jacob's household.¹⁴⁹ This may be a reasonable inference as Jacob came very close to integration with the Shechemites in every way, except for circumcision, which in ch. 34 is shown as the feature distinguishing his family from the Canaanites.¹⁵⁰ The Shechemites see marriage as the link by which they become one with the family of Jacob, while the latter sees circumcision as a prerequisite for such a link (34:15,16). The view that marriage forms an irrevocable bond between two different groups is illustrated by the strong law in Israel against intermarriage, which is described as תועבה, an abominable or ritually unclean thing (Deut 7:1-4; Ezr 9:1-2,11-12,14). However, the patriarchal narratives do not view marriage alliance with other nations as a religious

¹⁴³ Italics added.

¹⁴⁴ Sarna (1989: 222).

¹⁴⁵ LXX and Sam Pent have a singular verb. The treaty was meant to be between the clans of Nahor and the clans of Abraham; cf. Skinner (1930: 398); Driver (1948: 289).

¹⁴⁶ Sarna (1989: 222); cf. TSSI (2: iA: 8-12).

¹⁴⁷ Sarna (1989:222). 'Fear of Isaac', פחד יצחק, is found only here. Its exact meaning is uncertain, although the context suggests that this is another name or expression for the 'God of the father'. For various suggestions, see Albright (1957a: 248-49); Hillers 1972: 90-92); Westermann (1985: 497).

¹⁴⁸ Images and tokens of foreign gods, like Rachel's teraphim, were presumed to belong to women, servants and maids from Aram, Westermann (1985: 551).

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Procksch (1924: 381-82).

¹⁵⁰ 'Circumcision', מילה, (including 'uncircumcised', ערל, ערלה, literally, 'with foreskin') occurs twenty-four times in the patriarchal narratives, all on three occasions (Gen 17, 34 and 21:4). For many scholars circumcision in Gen 17 is closely related to God's covenant with Abraham; Isaac (1964: 444-56); Kline (1968); Alexander (1983: 17-22). Hoenig (1962-63: 322), however, points out that the biblical passage does not define the circumcision itself as covenant. For ancient Near Eastern background, see Sasson (1966: 473-76). Rabbinic terminology, in which the rite of circumcision designated is as ברית, is based on this text, Hoenig (1962-63: 322-34). However, it is not clear how important circumcision was for the religion of the patriarchs. Since circumcision does not form part of patriarchal religious or cultic practices, as noted above in 1.3, it will not occupy us here.

issue, much less as impure. Their reason for marrying within their own clan was not religion or race, but tradition. Isaac and Rebekah gives no religious reason for wanting Jacob to marry someone from their own family (27:46 - 28:2). Esau's Hittite wives were disliked for making life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah, not for their religious affiliation (26:34,35). Joseph's marriage with the daughter of the Egyptian priest passes off without religious or racial comment (41:45). It is possible that for P, to whom these texts are usually ascribed, marriage within one's own people became a 'critical command' during the exilic period when, after the dissolution of the Israelite state, the family became 'the form of community that preserved the continuity of Israel and its religion.'¹⁵¹ However, if P altered the Jacob narrative to provide a basis for his views in the patriarchal stories, as Westermann thinks, why did he not also do the same with the Joseph story? Conversely, why did J (and E or, a J variant), who must be ignorant of Israel's exilic situation, prohibit marrying foreigners in Gen 24? Did J think of the purity of stock, as Skinner assumes?¹⁵² On the contrary, the patriarchs seem to have no concept of purity of either race or religion comparable to that of later authors of exilic/post-exilic times. Their practice of marriage does not suggest that they saw themselves as a specially chosen people by God who must remain distinct by marrying only among themselves. Neither did they conceive their religion or God as unique among other nations. They seem to have accepted their religion as one among others, or more precisely, they conceived of it as a family religion, and seemed to have no concern whether others knew, or should know their God. Neither did they seek after other gods.

Fourthly, besides realising that foreign gods or ritual contamination clings to his family, Jacob's call to purification and a renunciation of idols was meant to rally his family's allegiance to this God in order that he might be delivered from the possible retaliation of the neighbouring towns of Shechem. Jacob was seized with panic when his sons massacred the Shechemites. He realised that his family was isolated and few in number and could easily be annihilated by the people of the land. He was desperate for help, and wanted to ensure by every possible means that this God was favourable to him once more, as he had been in the encounter with Esau. Miraculously, what could have been a nightmare became a dignified pilgrimage to Bethel.¹⁵³ Therefore the author of Genesis assumes by Jacob's call for purification that Jacob knew the basic notion that a ritual preparation was in order before meeting a god in worship. The details of Jacob's command to part with the foreign gods and their subsequent burial along with the earrings¹⁵⁴ are the result of Jacob's awareness of their presence among his family members. The fact that they were carefully buried suggests that Jacob was not antagonistic toward them, but it was to

¹⁵¹ Westermann (1985: 448).

¹⁵² Most scholars attribute Gen 24 to J, though some assign it to J, E and a J variant. Gunkel (1902: 215-21); Procksch (1924: 4ff.); Skinner (1930: 340).

¹⁵³ Sarna 1989: 239).

¹⁵⁴ Sam Pent; Keel (1973: 306), thinks that earrings never have the meaning of amulets in the OT.

give his total allegiance to the God of Bethel according to the promise he made in his vow that he buried them.

7.5. Conclusion

In contrast to the enormous attention given to ritual and moral taboos in the ANE and Israel, the concepts of purity and defilement are rarely mentioned in the patriarchal stories. The taboos of the ANE are preoccupied more with the threat of danger and disease to the individuals than with ritual purity, and there is no clear idea of what the latter meant and what a particular deity expected of his devotees. By contrast, Israelite sources provide a clear legislation and rationale on purity and defilement, and the legislation is concerned with the individual's participation in cult and social life. However, the patriarchal narratives contain neither legislation nor any concern for ritual or moral taboos, rather they contain frequent unconditional promises of posterity, land and protection. Death, burial and mourning customs are frequently attested indicating a belief in afterlife that is common to other cultures in the ANE. There is only one allusion to an idea of pollution by contact with the dead in the Joseph cycle, but there is no record of purification from it. It is not certain if the author was alluding the Egyptian or patriarchal customs. The idea of defilement occurs several times in connection with illicit sex, but it seems to have no implications for ritual purity. The only time the concepts occur with any religious importance is in the Jacob stories. But even here they do not have the same import as they have in the Priestly texts. Jacob's call for purification was a preparation before meeting with the holy God, and the burial of idols was part of that preparation as in the ANE.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

A distinct pattern of patriarchal religion emerges from the above investigation into patriarchal worship and cultic practices as portrayed in the patriarchal narratives. We may suggest that - altars, prayer and pillars - reflect patriarchal worship, while tithes, vows and purification their religious practices. In both sets, a pattern peculiar to patriarchal religion emerges from our study. In the ANE and Israel, worship was highly organised with an established cult and cultic personnel and with the occasion, purpose and procedures of sacrifices elaborately prescribed. By contrast, the patriarchal cultic practices were informal, with no fixed cult place or cult personnel and with no prescribed sacrifices or procedures.

Patriarchal altars were usually outside the settled communities and probably distinct from their public shrines. The occasions for their sacrifices were prompted by theophany, relocation, covenant and guidance. Unlike in the ANE and Israel, they had no festivals or sacrifices for healing or for battle. The purpose of patriarchal sacrifice is less clear, though it seems mainly to have been for worship, and occasionally for the fulfilment of vows or for thanksgiving.

Similarly, prayer in the patriarchal narratives occurs in the family and other informal contexts, unlike in the ANE and, to a large extent, Israel. Prayer is preserved entirely as a conversation between the patriarchs and God. The intercession of Abraham is the most telling example of this. Thus the content, setting and theology of prayer in the patriarchal narratives is distinct from that of both the ANE and Israel. This fits well with the practice and concept of sacrifice in the patriarchal narratives. While the form of patriarchal prayer is similar to that of the ANE and Israel, the range of problems for which the latter approached the deity are surprisingly lacking in the former, in that there is no prayer for sin and guilt, oppression by enemies or abandonment by the deity, although the patriarchs experienced all these problems. While the similarity of form reflects a universal pattern of prayer, the problems mentioned or ignored are distinctive to lifestyle and religion of the patriarchs. It is unlikely that patriarchs going through such problems would not have turned to their God for help, but to record and preserve such experiences would be a concern for an organised cult and society. The fact that such problems are not recorded in the patriarchal narratives suggests the lack of an organised cult or society. The most revealing of all their prayer is

the prayer of blessing. While the occasions for blessing in all the cultures, including patriarchal, were identical, the setting of patriarchal blessing is distinct from the others in that it was never cultic. Another distinctive aspect of patriarchal blessing is the possession of land. Whereas this was singularly important for their nomadic lifestyle, it is not found elsewhere. Further, while prayer is assumed in the context of building altars and offering sacrifices, prayer or sacrifice is not used to manipulate the deity, as was common in the organised cults of ANE and Israel.

The most distinctive feature of patriarchal religion is the raising of pillars by Jacob in response to theophanies. Patriarchal sacrifices and prayers display at least some similarities to ancient Near Eastern and Israelite practices, although their occasion and purpose in most cases were distinct for the patriarchs. But pillars were strongly condemned in later Israel, while in the ANE they were found only in cultic areas or were promised by the devotees. They are not attested as being raised in response to theophanies. Jacob's pillars are unique in that they signify not only worship and commemoration of God and his theophanies but also the establishment of a contractual bond with him. Nevertheless, they are not to be identified with either *baetylia* or the sacred stones which embody the deities they represent, and Jacob's worship was not to the *numen* dwelling in the stone.

The patriarchs' practices of tithes, vow making and purificatory rites were similarly distinct, and compatible with their lifestyle and worship. The unvowed tithe paid by Abraham to the Canaanite priest-king Melchizedek and the unpaid tithe vowed to God by Jacob were not regular, annual, obligatory tithes, but single, voluntary tithes in contrast to the tithe practices in the ANE and Israel. It is uncertain whether Abraham's tithe reflects his religious beliefs, although he was following ancient custom attested both in the ANE and Israel where a portion of the booty was paid to the deity. This single activity does not establish his allegiance to the Canaanite deity but rather his exigent circumstance. His normal pattern of worship was to build an altars or plant a tree and call on the name of Yahweh. Jacob's tithe, however, was part of his vow, and thus certainly a religious obligation. There is no mention of its payment, although it was probably subsumed in his religious feast at Bethel, given the lack of priests or organised cult to receive it. Thus the patriarchs' tithes, while resembling ancient Near Eastern and Israelite practice, were distinct from it and compatible with their own wandering lifestyle and non-localised religion.

The familiar custom of vow making appears to be as old as prayer and is attested in all cultures of the ANE from the early second millennium. The objects vowed in Jacob's vow, such as tithes, loyalty and a shrine, are very common in the vows of the ANE. This suggests that the patriarchs were familiar with the practice, though not all of them made use of the custom. In contrast to tithing, which is attested with both Abraham and Jacob, vow

making occurs only with Jacob. Apart from the fact that this practice reveals his religious beliefs, the element of bargain involved in vow making particularly suited Jacob's situation and character. While Abraham and Isaac encountered critical moments such as childlessness, famine and enforced travel in their lives, they did not resort to vows. They prayed in some cases and used other methods in others. But the fact that Jacob made use of this form suggests that it suited not only his critical situation when facing uncertain future, but also his character. Therefore Jacob's vow was a matter of his choice, in conformity with his character as portrayed in the narrative. Further, in contrast to ANE and Israel, Jacob made a vow at an obscure place where there was not even a sanctuary. The fact that Jacob did not bother to fulfil his vow even long after his safe arrival in the land of promise, a condition stipulated in his vow, suggests that he did not know legislation common in the ANE and Israel that vows once made must not be delayed, even less deferred. When Jacob finally arrived at Bethel, he merely builds an altar, offers sacrifices and raises a pillar, but there is no mention of either payment of tithes or raising a sanctuary. The narrator was probably more concerned with Jacob's escape from Shechem than with his fulfilment of the vow. Or he was deliberately vague, if not silent, about the fulfilment of his vow, because it involved an established cult and priests which are incompatible with the patriarchal religion and lifestyle that he had portrayed thus far. Therefore Jacob's vow was only partially fulfilled, in that he offered worship and pledged his loyalty to the God who had been with him. Thus, just as his payment of tithes, Jacob's fulfilment of his vow is compatible with his nomadic lifestyle and religion.

Similarly, the ideas of purity and defilement attested in the patriarchal narratives are compatible with patriarchal lifestyle and religion, and are unlike those attested in the ANE and Israel. The idea of pollution by death is not very significant in the patriarchal stories. Although death, burial and mourning customs are frequently attested, there is only one possible allusion to uncleanness by death, and that in the Joseph cycle set in Egypt. We are not certain if the author was alluding to the peculiar patriarchal custom or to the Egyptian practice, since Joseph was married to the daughter of an Egyptian priest. The idea of pollution by contact with the dead is probably present, but there is no record of purification from it. The fact that this idea is given little or no significance, in contrast to its paramount importance in the Priestly system, suggests that the author himself thought that pollution from death for the patriarchs was just a social custom at the least, and could affect only the individuals at the most. As in Israel, there is no sanctuary in the threat of pollution since they had no sanctuary or ritual laws. In contrast, death pollution in the Priestly system is a serious defilement, and the human corpse is the greatest pollutant which could threaten the defilement of the sanctuary. The high priest who serves in the inner sanctuary is protected

by every means from corpse contamination, even though he enters there only once a year. Even the ritual law of the ANE is nowhere near as strict as the Priestly law regarding corpse contamination. However, the only time the concepts occur with any religious importance in the patriarchal narratives is in the Jacob stories. But even here they do not have the same import as in the Priestly texts. Their background is to be sought in the ancient Near Eastern cultures. Thus Jacob's call for purification and renunciation of foreign gods has closer similarities with the practices of the ANE, since purification is called for before approaching a holy place and foreign gods are carefully buried to affirm loyalty to one's own God. That Jacob was following such a practice is demonstrated from his own experience at Bethel, in Paddan-aram and at Shechem. Therefore Jacob's practice is distinct from Israel's. In some sense it is also distinct from the ANE, because the place where Jacob went to meet with God had no organised cult or priests. By himself he called for purification, buried the idols and other tokens of foreign gods, and on arrival at the holy place built an altar, offered sacrifices and worshipped God. Thus, though his practices reflect ancient Near Eastern ones, the pattern of his worship is his own compatible with his lifestyle and religion.

Thus the patriarchal religious practices are compatible with their worship pattern and their belief in a family God who went along with them wherever they went. Their worship and religious practices are distinct from both ancient Near Eastern and Israelite practices, although they reflect elements of the latter at several points. The patriarchal religion is family oriented, clan based and compatible with the semi-nomadic lifestyle of the patriarchs. Thus the Genesis account of patriarchal religion is feasible, not a likely product of later imagination. Further, the patriarchs appear not only to be living as aliens in the land but also as aliens to the indigenous cult. Their social and political relations with the native inhabitants were usually harmonious, but only on the basis that they were still aliens. This means that their ethnic difference made them distinct as much as their religious practices. This probably had a large effect on their religious observances. The problem of religious syncretism became an issue only after Israel claimed the land as her own and wanted to become like the native inhabitants, but this does not seem to have been a problem for the patriarchs. Thus their religion was probably less syncretistic than that of Israel at other periods.

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Abbreviations

AAA	<i>Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology</i>
AB	Anchor Bible
ABR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
AfO	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
AnBib	Analecta biblica
AnOr	Analecta Orientalia
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOS	American Oriental Society
ARW	<i>Archiv für Religionswissenschaft</i>
ASOR	The American Schools of Oriental Research
ASTI	<i>Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BibOr	Biblica et Orientalia
BibRev	<i>Bible Review</i>
BIP	Biblical Institute Press
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i>
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BSC	Bible Student's Commentary
BSS	Biblical Seminar Series
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BWANT	<i>Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament</i>
BZAW	Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBA	Catholic Biblical Association
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CBSC	Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges
CM	<i>Classica et Mediaevalia</i>
CUP	Cambridge University Press
EtBib	Etudes bibliques
EI	<i>Ereš Israel</i>

<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<i>ExpT</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
FOTL	Forms of Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>Fs.</i>	Festschrift Volume
HAK	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
HUP	Harvard University Press
ICC	International Critical Commentary
HUP	Harvard University Press
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
IVP	Inter-Varsity Press
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBR</i>	<i>Journal of Bible and Religion</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
<i>JEA</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenistic Studies</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
<i>JPOS</i>	<i>Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society</i>
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTS	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>KD</i>	<i>Kerygma und Dogma</i>
KHCAT	Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament
LCL	The Loeb Classical Library

NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NICOT	The New International Commentary on the Old Testament
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OECI	Oxford Editions of Cuneiform Inscriptions
OECT	Oxford Editions of Cuneiform Texts
OIP	Oriental Institute of Pensilvania
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
<i>Or</i>	<i>Orientalia</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>OTS</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
OUP	Oxford University Press
PBI	Pontifical Biblical Institute
PIB	Pontificum Institutum Biblicum
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>RA</i>	<i>Revue d'assyriologie et orientale</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>REJ</i>	<i>Revue des études juives</i>
<i>RHR</i>	<i>Religious History Review</i>
<i>Rel St R</i>	<i>Religious Studies Review</i>
rev. edn.	Revised edition
Sam Pent	Samaritan Pentateuch
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monographs Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SCM	Student Christian Movement
<i>SH</i>	<i>Scripta Hierosolymitana</i>
SOTSMS	Society of Old Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>St Th</i>	<i>Studia Theologica</i>
<i>St Or</i>	<i>Studia Orientalia</i>
<i>TB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
<i>TY</i>	<i>Tantur Yearbook</i>
<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
UCP	University of California Press
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>VTs</i>	<i>Supplements to Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentaries

WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
YOS	Yale Oriental Series
YUP	Yale University Press
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>